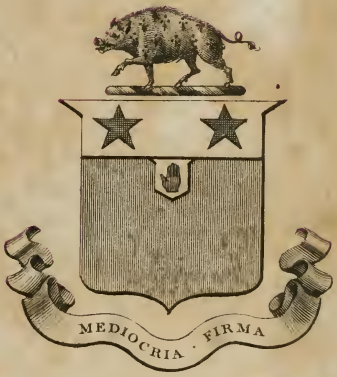
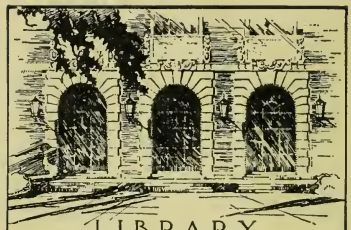


Sir Edmund Bacon Bar.t



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MATILDA;

A TALE OF THE DAY.

" Blush I not?
Can you not read my fault writ in my cheek?
Is not my crime there?"

FOURTH EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
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MATILDA.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Day passed after day, and week succeeded week, and still found Lord Ormsby habitually frequenting Lady Matilda's rooms in a morning, and her opera-box in an evening. Nor was there any thing in their easy intercourse calculated to excite observation in others, or uneasiness in Matilda herself. For such is the happy construction of society abroad, that between persons at all of the same set, the effort is required, not to meet, but to avoid meeting. The growth of inti-

macy is there natural, spontaneous, and unrestrained, like that of the luxuriant vegetation of the happy climate itself. Society does not there require to be *forced*, as in the *hot-houses* of London; where, with various devices of pruning and grafting, constant care of *nailing down* one, and *cutting* another, acquaintanceship is sometimes brought to an artificial perfection.

But though the style of society in which they then lived, prevented Matilda from feeling any impropriety in the mere act of daily seeing Lord Ormsby, yet there were some circumstances which gradually opened her eyes, as to the prudence of such habitual indulgence. Involuntarily, she found herself most frequently practising those pieces of music which he had most admired; till, whilst she herself thought that she sung nothing else so ill, every indifferent individual observed

how much the most perfect in them appeared both her taste and execution. Unintentionally too, she found herself copying over and over again, in miniature, a favourite picture of his; still thinking that she had never yet hit the expression, though her table was covered over with accurate fac-similes of it.

I have said, that, in Matilda's education, the influence of fixed principles upon conduct had never been inculcated. She was the creature of impulse, and of feeling, guided only by an innate sense of right, and protected by the most sensitive feminine delicacy. She now felt dissatisfied with herself, though utterly unconscious of any thing incorrect, even in thought.

In the mean time, the intimacy was constantly encouraged by Sir James, who was flattered by shewing off, as he thought in his train, so distinguished an individual as Lord

Ormsby. Besides which, he never lost sight of the solid advantages he thought might be derived in his own county, from maintaining the connexion.

Still Matilda became anxious to move; and as the autumnal stream of babbling English was flowing South, the Baronet willingly consented to proceed to Rome.

Who shall attempt to analyse the sensations excited by Rome—unique and unaccountable as they are—felt even by him most disposed to laugh at the hyperbolical enthusiasm of the classical pedant?—Rome is still Rome. Though Cardinals are not Consuls, and the last dying embers of spiritual despotism are smouldering on those hearths where were kindled the first sparks of civil liberty,—still is it the Eternal City. And why?—Why should those monuments of the olden time, seen here, cause an impression felt

nowhere else?—Local situation cannot cause it. Ruins are most impressive when abstracted and isolated; whereas here they are defiled with all the daily filth of incongruous inhabitancy.—It is not mental association;—for what are, or were, in point of fact, the objects of our admiration? The Coliseum, that stupendous undertaking, for the mere gratification of savage cruelty, and brutal barbarism;—Temples, those favoured abodes of ignorance and idolatry;—and Baths, the works of men only known for mental imbecility, or moral depravity, who have thus immortalized themselves by these monuments of their physical indulgences.

But he who should argue by the hour to prove absurd the feeling excited by Rome, would not be able to defend himself from full participation in it, if, in the middle of his

argument, he caught the first glimpse of the dome of Saint Peter's.

With so contradictory and inconsistent an animal as man, the very incongruities I have mentioned, do but increase the excitement, and heighten the effect. There is nothing like unto Rome after all. Even to those who have no cherished recollections of its former state—to whom the first page of the Latin Grammar is beyond their *ultima Thule* of classic lore—to those whose only pursuit is amusement—Rome possesses peculiar attractions. In the morning, it is pleasanter far to feast one's eyes on the choicest collections of the *beau idéal*, left in the immortal galleries of genius, than to sit in a club-room, spelling over the dull realities of the day. At night, it is sweeter far to see the silver moon, with her uncertain light, partially illumining the

beautifully broken outlines of the Coliseum, than to catch the angular glare of painted lamps, through the dense and drizzling vapours of Vauxhall.—The eye can no more hesitate in its choice, than can the ear between the marrow-bones and cleavers of London, and the vespers of Saint Peter's.

But, of all the delights of Rome, that which afterwards leaves the most cherished recollection, is the genial glow which climate, or some other indefinable cause, here throws over society. Here cold reserve melts away, political prejudices are softened, all the kindlier feelings are cultivated, and intimacy spontaneously ripens.

This was delightful to Matilda, who was peculiarly formed to be the ornament of a select circle.—Since her marriage, with the exception of the short *séjour* at Milan and Geneva, she had only alternately exchanged

the vortex of London for the cheerless languor of an unsocial domestic *ménage*. Here, however, she found herself surrounded by admiring companions, who were free alike from the two extremes of inactive *ennui*, or restless care, which hold divided empire over London society. Here were principally found persons of cultivated minds, who seemed united upon the principle of avoiding every topic which could be subject of annoyance to themselves, or each other; and who, skimming over the surface of life alone, found everywhere around them subjects of interest, which their refined taste enabled them fully to appreciate.

In such a society, the arrival of so gifted an individual as Lady Matilda Dornton, could not be viewed with indifference; and her house soon became the never-failing point of attraction for the evening *coterie;* though this preference was put to a severe test for Anglo-

Romans, by Sir James, whose dignity required a larger mansion than could be found in the immediate vicinity of the Piazza di Spagna, which is the English quarter at Rome. He therefore had taken a large Palazzo in a distant part of the town; and hither the *élite* of English society nightly migrated, to pay their adoration at the shrine of their new divinity.

Nightly was Matilda's *salon* filled with all that was most distinguished then in Rome; not, as at a London rout, stuffed and choked like an overgrown American forest, but more like a pleasure ground, where the most favoured productions of every climate were carefully disposed to the greatest advantage.

One, however, there was constantly there, as a matter of course, whom Matilda could well have spared. The reader may recollect a certain Mrs. Mechlin, who was mentioned

as a constant inmate at the late Lord Wakefield's, and who had been mainly instrumental in promoting the marriage between Lady Matilda and Sir James; to effect which, she had not been very scrupulous in her assertions with regard to Lord Ormsby. Recent circumstances having given Matilda more accurate insight into the real state of the case upon that subject, it is not to be supposed that she felt very grateful to Mrs. Mechlin for her conduct upon that occasion. But still she had known Matilda from childhood. She might, too, have been mistaken herself, in what she had positively asserted. She was also supposed to be very much straitened in her circumstances. All this induced the kind heart of our heroine to give her, upon her unexpected arrival at Rome, a much warmer welcome than she deserved.

Mrs. Mechlin had undertaken the journey,

determined that the absence of Matilda from England should not be the means of depriving her, for a whole year, of all the advantages in society which she meant to appropriate to herself, from the splendid marriage, of which she considered herself in a great part the authoress. How she had contrived to effect so long and expensive a journey, remained a mystery; as it was well known that it was only by extraordinary expedients, and by annual dependent visits for ten months out of every twelve, that she contrived to keep up appearances in London for the other two. In fact, she was obliged to connect the end of one June to the beginning of the next May, with a long string of country cousins, in order to make both ends meet. She therefore rather suggested, than accepted the offer, of making the Dorntons' palazzo her home, during her stay in Rome.

Sir James, who was always open to flattery,

was easily taken with her winning ways, and she soon became an immense favourite with him; the advantages of which favour she knew full well how to turn to the best account. Matilda, on her part, certainly did not renew the intimacy with her former friend, with exactly the feelings towards her which, in early youth, she had entertained. She was, it is true, almost angry with herself for distrusting her; but though Mrs. Mechlin was always particularly observant of all the outward appearances of propriety, still, now that Matilda had acquired more knowledge of the world than she had then possessed, she could not help having her doubts as to the correctness of the conduct of her somewhat *passée*, but still showy-looking friend. Nor, indeed, upon reflecting on several circumstances which had made little impression at the time, could she think that her intimacy with Lord Wakefield had been entirely above suspicion.

Still the fascinating manners, and easy lively conversation of Mrs. Mechlin, made her by no means an unwelcome addition to any small society.

One evening, about a fortnight after the Dorntons had established themselves in their palazzo, the usual self-invited inmates had made up the evening party; for "circle" I will not call it, as *that* implies form, all of which was absent. It was a constellation of beauty and talent, where shone many a social star, brilliant in its own sphere, yet gladly revolving round our heroine, when within the orb of her superior attraction. Here too were mingled, in easy, and even friendly conversation, the banished Constitutionalist from Cadiz, and the willing slave from the Crimea, —all alike anxious to forget every thing that was distant and disagreeable, in the pleasure that was present.

On a fauteuil, drawn close to the sofa, where were seated Matilda and Mrs. Mechlin, was posted our friend Colonel Canteen, the male gossip of Geneva, who had arrived the day before. One of the first subjects of conversation he chose, was, " I wonder, Lady Matilda, what has become of Ormsby? I have not seen any thing of him since his apparition at Geneva. To be sure, I have not been in the way of knowing much, for I came *viâ* Genoa and Florence; and Tynte chose to delay us a fortnight at Lerici, by catching a fever in sketching the Bay. I was, indeed, most properly bored there, though I must say the fish in the Gulf of La Spezzia is quite particular. But where Ormsby has hid himself all this time, I can't conceive."

" We saw Lord Ormsby frequently at Milan," said Matilda.

" Well—I wish he would drop in upon us

here some of these days," said the Colonel; "and give us the light of his countenance in not quite such a Will-o'-the-Wisp style as he did at Geneva."

"I can't say I think," said Mrs. Mechlin, "that Lord Ormsby would be any improvement to our party. He is no great favourite of mine. His whole life has been too much in the Will-o'-the-Wisp style, as you are pleased to call it. He once hung out his deceitful lights on much too serious an occasion," looking attentively at Matilda as she spoke. "I don't soon forgive those who wrong my friends. I should be very sorry to see him."

Hardly had Mrs. Mechlin concluded, when the door opened; and the Roman Servitore di Piazza having attempted something which he meant for an English name, but which

might as well have been wild Indian, the object of the late conversation himself entered.

Matilda advanced to meet him, not with indifference certainly, not perhaps without a struggle with inward emotion, but with little apparent embarrassment of manner. The usual inquiries produced the necessary replies, that he had arrived that afternoon, had inquired her residence, and hastened to pay his respects; any further conversation between them, which might have been rendered awkward by the eyes of all being inquiringly directed towards the stranger, was for the moment interrupted by Mrs. Mechlin, with her sweetest smile:—

"Dear Lord Ormsby, I am delighted to see you! what a time it is since we met! I am so glad to see you again."

Nor was this warmth entirely assumed,

though so completely at variance with the sentiments we have just heard her utter. It was, as she said, long since they had met, and she could not help at once feeling that he was looking uncommonly handsome; and any woman who, like Mrs. Mechlin, retained all her former greedy appetite for admiration, with an increasing fear that she might soon be put on short commons in that particular, must be naturally eager to assert an early claim to a share of the fresh food for conquest that had just arrived.

Matilda's manner towards Ormsby during the rest of the evening was in no respect sufficiently marked to be observable by indifferent spectators, but was felt by him to be studiously colder, and more constrained, than it would have been to a common acquaintance, who had in the same manner unexpectedly arrived. This forced reserve,—the most truly

feminine, and at the same time the most unequivocal, if not the most obtrusive mark of increasing interest, more especially where a sense of duty is struggling with irresistible impulse, is, it is strange to say, almost always misconstrued by the man who is the object of it; and such was the mistaken impression received by Ormsby, who left Matilda that evening, with the conviction that he was avoided from indifference, and half muttering between his teeth something about "cold unfeeling coquette," as, with a vague indefinite feeling of universal jealousy, he recalled the unmeaning smile of one man, the affected hand-shaking of a second, the studied compliment of a third, and the evident admiration of all.

CHAPTER XIX.

After passing a sleepless night, in ingeniously tormenting himself with the idea that Matilda had too plainly shewn by her manner that she never wished to see him again, Ormsby, nevertheless, rose sooner than if he had slept soundly; and, earlier than even a certain welcome would have justified a morning visit, he found himself threading the somewhat intricate streets which separated his lodging in the Piazza di Spagna from the palazzo, which latter, as we have before stated, was in a distant part of the town.

Utterly unconscious of whom he met, or what he saw, he had almost arrived at his journey's end, when he was suddenly stopped

by Sir James Dornton, who was sallying forth thus early on business.

" Delighted to see you, my dear Lord," he began; " very good of you to do me the honour of a call last night,—very sorry that I happened to have gone to the opera with Baron Joulterdolt, the Hanoverian. I have several things I wished to talk to your Lordship about. Perhaps you would have no objection just to step this way. I was going to the gunsmith's close by for a minute." Lord Ormsby hesitated a moment.—This was not at all the sort of expedition which had induced him to come out so early; and he began an excuse, " Why, I was just intending,"—when a certain inward consciousness prevented his owning to Sir James that he had been meditating a visit to Matilda. He therefore turned to accompany the Baronet.

Upon what trivial, and apparently inconsequent circumstances do the most important events sometimes seem to have depended! The heedless choice between two indifferent alternations, seems afterwards to have determined the fate of Ormsby and Matilda.

Sir James was one of those, who, upon setting out on a tour of Italy, had thought it necessary to provide himself with a pair of Manton's hair-trigger pistols, calculated to take the most infallible aim at the most minute mark, as an appropriate defence against a whole population of brigands, who, if they attack at all, always pop at you on all sides from behind stone walls, without ever shewing themselves. However, Sir James felt quite safe with his pocket protectors; and, one being a little out of order, he had been very uneasy till it should be mended. He had therefore himself taken them to a neighbouring gunsmith and sword-

maker, who had the reputation of also furnishing arms to his enemies, the brigands, upon a much more wholesale scale; though this of course was unknown to the Baronet.

Sir James was pretty well versed in that *patois* of good society in England, which is called French; but of Italian he knew not one syllable, and seemed perfectly satisfied with his ignorance. It is not therefore to be wondered at that this circumstance, joined to a natural confusion in the mode of expressing himself, rendered the directions with which he had left his pistols perfectly unintelligible to the Roman shopkeeper. But as there is nothing to which an Italian will not assent for the sake of a job, he had received all Sir James's incomprehensible orders with an "*Ah! capisco bene, eccellenza—non pense—sì Signore—non c'è dubbio,*" &c. Accordingly, the pistols had been left there in perfect security

that all that was wanted would be done; and to reclaim them was the object of the present visit. At the commencement of the scene which ensued, Lord Ormsby remained at the outer door, with his back to the shop, his eyes unconsciously fixed on the only corner of the palazzo which was visible from thence; his thoughts wandering still further from what was passing around him. He was therefore no witness to Sir James's indignation, when the shopkeeper, with a self-satisfied "*Eccole*," presented him with what had been his pistols, now hardly to be recognised;—the unrivalled beauties of Manton's best workmanship having been contaminated by a forced *mésalliance* with the Roman's own clumsy handicraft.

After Sir James had vented his complaints in mingled French and English execrations, all of which the Italian bore with imperturbable complacency (a calmness probably induced by

the certain expectation of the concluding question of his customer), in despair he was at length obliged to inquire, "*Combien?*" This was probably the only word of French of which the shopkeeper had an intuitive knowledge; and he immediately replied, with characteristic impudence, "*Ah, come vuole—niente—solamente dieci scudi.*"

"What the Devil!" said Sir James, in irrestrainable English.

"*Dieci,*" repeated the Italian, holding up all the fingers of both hands in pantomimic explanation.

Sir James, who, from the increasing difficulty of communication, began to think "action much better than speech," now seized hold of one of the pistols, by way of having possession on his side of the dispute.

"*Ah! questi no,*" said the Italian, retaining the butt end in his grasp.

Sir James's temper, which was none of the most enduring, was completely overset by this resistance, and having got undisputed hold of the other pistol, he dealt a stunning blow with the butt end on the skull of his antagonist. This rash act attracted the attention of another party, a wild-looking savage mountaineer, a brother of the shopkeeper, who had hitherto remained in the back of the *bottega*, occupied most inopportunely in polishing and sharpening a courier's *couteau de chasse*, which had been left for that purpose. He was one of those "Children of the Sun, with whom revenge is virtue;" and here was a case in which the indulgence of that passion was more the effect of spirit-boiling temperament, of veins effervescent of liquid fire, than the cold blooded and calculating instance given by the dramatist, whose sentence I quoted.

The first object that caught Lord Ormsby's

glance, when, roused by the noise, he turned suddenly round, was this infuriated being, in the act of rushing forward,—the deadly weapon in his hand, as, newly polished, it glittered in the sun, but yielded in brilliancy to the flash of his fiery eye. Already had he seized his victim, and a single second would have closed for ever Sir James's earthly career, when the arm which was in the act of descending was suddenly checked with a strong shock, and fell powerless beneath Ormsby's vigorous grasp.

The ruffian immediately closed with his new antagonist; and, as Ormsby was collecting his strength to hurl him indignantly away, the assassin changed his hand, shortened his hold of the weapon, and twice stabbed him in the side. Our hero grasped him convulsively for a moment, and then as involuntarily relaxing his hold, tottered and fell without a groan on

the floor, which was soon flooded with his blood.

Whilst the first impulse of Sir James was of course to rush towards Lord Ormsby, the ruffian took advantage of that opportunity to escape.

Our hero's case seemed desperate. From a faint struggle at respiration it was evident that he still breathed; but it seemed impossible but that life must issue in the stream which continued to flow in torrents from his wounds. At this moment the courier, whose knife had been used as the murderous instrument, happened to enter the shop to reclaim it, and being recognised by Sir James as our friend Pierre, he was eagerly applied to for assistance by the Baronet; whose presence of mind had completely abandoned him in this sudden crisis.

Pierre possessing that sort of smattering of surgery which many of his profession have,

succeeded to a certain degree in staunching for a moment the wounds; when he suggested the propriety of removing him if possible at once, and even before the arrival of the surgeon. To carry him home to the *Piazza di Spagna* was impossible, from the distance. "To my house, to my house next door," said Sir James; and leaving the courier to superintend the removal, he determined at once to set off to the police to give the information that might be necessary for the apprehension of the culprit, without its ever occurring to him, that it might be as well first to prepare Lady Matilda for the unexpected shock of seeing a dying man brought to her house.

Matilda had risen that morning, internally satisfied with her own conduct, yet, in spite of herself, gratified at the certainty of seeing Ormsby. Notwithstanding all her cause for care, her natural buoyancy of spirit played

upon her sunshiny countenance, as she lightly bounded down one of two parallel flights of the marble stairs, which, divided by a wall, led from her apartments to the court below. At that moment the melancholy procession, headed by Pierre, was ascending the lower flight with their apparently lifeless burthen; and on reaching the central landing-place, such was the heart-rending revulsive shock Matilda was fated to receive.

No words can describe the peculiar and protracted sound of her agonizing scream. Even the base rabble who assisted in bearing the body, groaned in sympathy as they felt it thrill through their veins. It had the power, too,—(far beyond the utmost effort of surgical skill, or physical art,) to dispel for a moment the death-like lethargy of its bleeding object. His livid lips faintly quivered, and for an instant

he half unclosed his glassy eye, as Matilda sunk senseless by his side.

When the surgeon who had been sent for had dressed Lord Ormsby's wounds, and went to Matilda to intimate that all hope was not completely lost, he found her gradually recovering the shock she had received; but there was still such a wildness in her manner, as she resolutely demanded to see his patient, that, as Sir James was not at home, and there was nobody who had any right to controul her, the medical man did not feel himself authorised to refuse.

Upon entering the apartment, taking Ormsby's cold and clammy hand within hers, and fixedly gazing on his motionless features, she resisted all attempts at removal, with an unvarying repetition of "No, no; not yet:" so that upon the revival of nature's efforts, when

he showed signs of returning animation, his eyes first opened on that loved form whose beauteous grief betrayed an intensity of interest, the inestimable knowledge of which he felt cheaply purchased at the price he was then paying for it.

Whether in virtue of this "medicine for a mind diseased," or his natural strength of bodily constitution, the surgeon before he left him made an unexpectedly favourable report; upon receiving which, all Matilda's sense of propriety returned; she consigned the care of him to a more appropriate nurse; and had retired from the room before her husband came home from his long and unsatisfactory search after justice.

CHAPTER XX.

We have of late, gentle reader, rather dropped the acquaintance of the Hobson family. But though it would be hard to expect, now that you are better acquainted with their characters, that you should submit to continuing on an intimate footing with them, yet they are too nearly connected with one, in whose fate I am particularly anxious that you should be interested, for me to allow you altogether to cut them.

On the morning in which you were first made acquainted with their arrival in Rome, by the interference of their *courier Pierre*, in the gunsmith's shop, the female members of the Hobson family were, as usual, assembled in rather a dark, dingy-looking *salone* of an

old-fashioned palazzo,—armed with netting-needles, paper, cutting scissars, tambour-frames, and sundry other ancient and primitive weapons, generally employed in all amazonian attempts to kill time. But old Father Time made a very good fight of it with them; and they had already shewn, by sundry yawns, how much, in spite of all their efforts, they felt his power, when they were relieved by the arrival of two auxiliaries, who had of late frequently been very useful in enabling them to get the better of a troublesome half hour or two. These were our Milan acquaintances, the Rev. Mr. Simperton, and his pupil, young Squire Woodhead. Mr. Simperton, as has been hinted before, was very anxious to cultivate the intimacy of the Hobson family; which fact must now be explained to have arisen from its having occurred to him, that a wife, with twenty thousand pounds,

would be a very pretty addition to his present income, arising from a small college living, the tithes of which he considered as quite inadequate, even to wash his surplice and buy his sermon. This gilding of the matrimonial pill reconciled him to swallowing even such a bouncing bolus as Miss Betty Hobson.

But could he also persuade his pupil to pay due homage to the charms of the younger sister, Miss Anne, what prospects might then be open to him! — In meditating on this, indistinct visions floated before his eyes, in which were traced the festive board at Woodhead Hall, at the bottom of which, he was himself bending over a well-filled tureen, with a bottle of iced champagne at his right hand. Then he saw himself on a picked hunter, in the hunt uniform, of a clerical colour, and the buttons cut in horn. More remotely, but still contingent on the connexion, he thought he

felt his buck-skin breeches covered with a short black apron, and his thin waving locks concealed under a snug bush wig.

With such anticipations, it is not to be wondered at, that, on their way to the Hobsons that morning, he had exerted all his eloquence to persuade his docile pupil, that he ought to (what is called) pop the question to Miss Anne Hobson. He had reason to think, too, that his success had been complete; and indeed, so far as a complete acquiescence on the part of his docile pupil, in the propriety of his immediately making his proposals, so it had. But this was easier said than done; or rather, it was easier thought than said; for Mr. Woodhead had the misfortune to be a very shy man; and though there was nothing very appalling in the appearance of Miss Anne Hobson, yet there is a certain artificial awe, with which even the

boldest of men, for the time, regard her whom they are about to invest with the power of refusing them.

Circumstances were, however, rather favourable to the recovery of Mr. Woodhead's self-possession. Mrs. Hobson was generally the most *désœuvrée* of the party; as, after the bustle of travelling had subsided, she found much fewer congenial occupations at Rome than at Manchester, and had already begun inflicting upon her family her daily dose of habitual wonderment about trifles;—"I wonder why it never snows here!"—"I wonder when the Pope will die!"—"I wonder where the letters are!"

This species of unimportant admiration, furnishing very constant employment to those who have little either to do or to think about, had at length left Mrs. Hobson nothing else to wonder about, but—where Mr. Hobson could

be? She had accordingly quitted the room to investigate that important matter, and Mr. Simperton had been received by Miss Hobson with that pretty playful petulance which is traditional among all boarding-school Misses, as the proper purgatory with which they ought to torment an anxious admirer. This he had submitted to with the prescribed patience of an humble suitor, and to such unfounded attacks as—"Indeed, I don't know whether I ought to speak to you at all, when you cut me dead at Duchess Torlonia's last night. I saw you, Sir, Philandering away."

In vain, for some time, did the Reverend Philander protest against so unfounded an imputation; till the young lady, thinking that she had tormented him the legitimate length of time, according to the most recent marble-covered maxims of the Minerva press, he was again reinstated in favour, and they retired to

the window, where they leant out, in conversation, leaving Mr. Woodhead to vent his feelings, perfectly unrestrained by interruption.—But it was in vain that the latter gentleman attempted to begin; nor did Miss Anne, who was, notoriously, the silent one of the family, at all assist his embarrassment. He sat on the edge of the sofa, looking out of the corners of his heavy lack-lustre eyes, at the monotonous movements of his mistress's netting needle; till, at length, from behind a well-rolled pocket-handkerchief, which he had stuffed almost into the cavity of his open mouth, he mumbled, "It is very warm, Miss Anne."

"Very,"—sharply retorted the young lady.

"It is warmer here than in Cheshire," after a pause, he resumed.

"Is it?" said she.

"You never were in Cheshire, were you?" inquired the lover.

"Stockport's Cheshire, Sir?" said Miss Anne.

"Oh! but that's not like my Cheshire," said the young gentleman, with more animation.—"Now, I wish—I should be very glad —I should like very much—I—if—"

This sounded a little like coming to the point, though Cheshire did not seem the obvious short-cut to it. But, as yet, Miss Anne was fated to continue in ignorance as to "what he wished—what he should be very glad of—what he should like very much;"—for, at this interesting moment, the Squire was interrupted by the entrance of Tom Hobson, evidently in great tribulation.

"Here's a rare go! By Jingo, this is a pretty country to live in!"

"What's the matter?" said the couple on the sofa.—"What's the matter?" echoed the couple from the window.

"Matter!—blow me tight!—why we're all going to be murdered; and half of us are already."

At this awful announcement, the ladies gave something between a squeak and a scream; and the gentlemen asking for further information, Tom continued,—"Why, Lord Ormsby and uncle Dornton have been attacked by banditti in disguise, here in the very town; and they've settled my Lord's job for him; and uncle's very bad indeed; and if Pierre had not killed two with his own hand (I saw his knife all bloody), they were going to have murdered all the English they could find."

"But is any body really dead?" said Simperton, who thought that he could detect something like exaggeration in Tom's confused account.

"Oh! yes; I'm sure Lord Ormsby's dead; for I joined some gentlemen that were talking

about it; and Sir George Dowercourt, that used to ride about with my Lord, at Milan, was saying how the barony and the estates all went to Miss Arlingford; and what a great catch she would be."

This interruption of Woodhead's *tête-à-tête*, as may be expected, put to flight the few scattered ideas that it had cost him such pains to collect; and postponed, for the present, his proposals to Miss Anne Hobson.

It will suffice to inform the reader, without detaining him longer in their society, that, a very few days afterwards, these proposals were brought to a successful issue. The *locale*, at length chosen by Woodhead, was a singular one. It was in that octagon closet of the Vatican, appropriated to the Apollo Belvidere, that the Squire told his tale of love, in strains which certainly shewed no symptoms of having been inspired by the divine influence of the

presence of the god of poetry; and there, whilst averting her eyes from that master-piece of manly beauty, Miss Anne Hobson cast a tender assenting leer on the clumsy, cart-horse carcase of her future husband. A few days afterwards, the Rev. Mr. Simperton, with a proper Protestant disregard of the Popish mummery around him, took the opportunity of the Vespers of Saint Peter's, to offer his vows at the shrine of Miss Betty Hobson; which, being most graciously received, the double union was arranged to his heart's content.

CHAPTER XXI.

For many days, Lord Ormsby's condition continued to be one of extreme danger.—The struggle was long and doubtful, between an excellent constitution, and wounds which in most cases would have been decidedly fatal.

It was also no small aggravation to Matilda's misery, under this protracted suspense, that she was doomed every day after dinner to hear her husband and Mrs. Mechlin discussing, with the utmost *sang froid*, the chance of his ultimate recovery;—Sir James illustrating, with scraps of superficial medical science, his own opinion, that nothing but a miracle could save him;—and Mrs. Mechlin carrying her speculations still farther into futurity, by

wondering, if he died, who would marry Miss Arlingford, and regretting that Lady Ormsby was not exactly the mother calculated to shew her off to the best advantage.

Upon the first day after the dreadful event, an express had been sent off for Lady Ormsby and Emily, who were still at Geneva, having been detained there by the opinion of Lady Ormsby's physicians, that the air of Italy, particularly in the summer, would be very injurious to her health, though little doubt was entertained that, immediately on the receipt of this intelligence, they would hasten to watch over the fate of their beloved Augustus. Distance, however, interposed an unavoidable delay; and, in the mean time, the patient's case had taken a favourable turn; and though dreadfully weakened, and presenting but the shadow of the fine manly form which so lately shone conspicuous, in all the pride and pleni-

tude of youth and health, yet he was now able to be moved on a sofa into the next apartment, which happened to be the one previously used as Matilda's morning room.

Sir James had by this time begun to be rather bored by staying so much at home, as he had thought it right to do during the period of Ormsby's extreme danger; and he now became impatient to continue the regular routine of sight seeing, which had been interrupted; and in this desire he was warmly seconded by Mrs. Mechlin, who was constantly rising in favour with him, as she continued to administer daily increasing doses of flattery, in a shape more undisguised than she would at first have ventured upon, till she had well ascertained how little fastidious his taste was for any thing in that line.

As Sir James could not but be aware, that

leaving Lord Ormsby entirely alone, in his present state, would be the height of inhospitality ; and under the circumstances of the case —of ingratitude, the expedient that naturally occurred to him and his female friend was, that Matilda should remain at home with him. —This at first our heroine opposed, from a feeling that it might appear odd in the eyes of the world, and that it certainly was incorrect in itself; yet, at length, a little piqued by her former friend, Mrs. Mechlin, in the sweetest manner, but at the same time pretty plainly giving her to understand, that they could do just as well without her; and not a little touched by Ormsby's helpless condition, she became involuntarily engaged in the daily exercise of all the endearing offices and tender attentions of a kind-hearted female, towards one whom, she discovered to her cost, sickness

and suffering had only invested with a stronger interest, and rendered more than ever dangerous.

This had continued for some days, when Lady Ormsby and Emily arrived, long after the dreaded crisis was happily past, and when our hero was slowly, but certainly recovering; having travelled as quickly as the distance allowed, and much more expeditiously than the state of Lady Ormsby's health rendered at all prudent.

When relieved from the painful suspense in which she had been absorbed on the journey, she felt severely for some days the effect of over-exertion; and during that time, of course, Ormsby was not deprived of the attendance of his former nurse. But when Lady Ormsby was again restored by rest and ease of mind, she became anxious that Emily should make the most of the short time that she remained

in Rome, to see all those sights which she might not for a long while have another opportunity of visiting, as the physicians were unanimous in opinion that she must herself leave Rome, and travel northwards before the warm weather set in. However attractive, therefore, Matilda's daily attendance had now become to her, she could no longer avoid abandoning it, in a great degree, to Lady Ormsby's more appropriate care, in order that she might herself accompany her young friend Emily in her morning rambles.

But though, on this account, much which would otherwise have carried conviction to Lady Ormsby's mind, as to the dangerous growth of improper feelings between her son and Matilda, was concealed from her observation, yet there was still enough, particularly in Ormsby's manner, to alarm her anxious and affectionate mind on the subject. This will be

best explained by mentioning the substance of a conversation, which she introduced with Matilda on the eve of her own departure from Rome, which departure she was at length most reluctantly compelled no longer to postpone, as she felt that the increasing heat of the weather was bringing on a return of her old complaint; and she knew that her life was too precious to her daughter Emily to justify any hesitation in taking all proper precautions for its prolongation.

It was that period of the afternoon, when Ormsby's still protracted debility rendered a short repose daily necessary, Emily had been induced to accompany some friends for the last time to Saint Peter's; whilst Lady Ormsby and Matilda were left alone together. Lady Ormsby had dropped her work, and was looking at Matilda with an expression of intense interest, which at length excited our heroine's

attention, who, tenderly kissing her respected friend's anxiously contracted brow, said, "Dear Lady Ormsby, why look so piteously on me? reproachfully, I had almost said, only that I feel I have done nothing to deserve it; and I am sure that reproach undeserved never escapes even in look from you."

"In those," said Lady Ormsby, "who feel a mother's care, without a mother's privilege, the eye will sometimes hint a fear, when the tongue dares not express a warning."

"Now I am sure," said Matilda, "that though unconsciously, I have done something wrong,—something, I am afraid, to prevent your loving me as you once did, or you would not hesitate to tell me of it; for all the good I ever learnt (little enough, alas!) came from you."

"My own Matilda, never can I love you less; nor can my only daughter ever be dearer

to me. The subject at which I hinted, and all the difficulties and delicacies of which for your sake I will brave, is one which to me, more than any other person in the world, is most difficult—most delicate. True, I was formerly your only monitress; and you still retain too grateful a recollection of my early services in that respect: for though I have nothing to reproach myself with in the principles I then inculcated, yet was I much to blame in some of the indulgences I then allowed in practice. I did it for the best; but, unconsciously, selfishness was, perhaps, at the bottom of my conduct. It was the darling wish of my heart, that in my declining years I might see two beings, almost equally dear to me, and who appeared formed for each other, happily united."

Matilda made no reply, nor even raised her fixed and downcast eye; but a few scorching

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tears, which chased each other down her burning cheek,—were the silent witnesses how little these feelings had been effaced from her heart.

Without pointedly remarking Matilda's emotion, Lady Ormsby affectionately pressed her hand, and continued: "In a prudential point of view, the encouragement I certainly then gave to the first appearance of a partiality, which might, as it afterwards has unhappily turned out, be the source of misery instead of bliss, was open to censure. But it may be some excuse, that I had once known the perfection of domestic happiness myself. True, the period allowed me was brief; indeed, I had long felt that my own career was closed. Every selfish feeling of pleasure was buried with him, for whom alone I had lived. But when I saw in Augustus, his father's self revived, and in you, dear Matilda, tenfold

more of personal charm and intellectual attractions than I, even in my best days, had ever possessed,—was it to be wondered at, that I should anxiously wish to have my old age cheered by the reflected happiness of those so dear to me? But why should I refer to those times, which are better forgotten, as they can never be recalled?"

"Oh, no!—for heaven's sake talk on," said Matilda; "let me, if possible, live them over again in thought. They are all of happiness I shall ever know."

"No, my dear child," said Lady Ormsby; "it was with very different intentions than to revive useless repinings, that I have ventured to speak to you on this subject, which, as I said before, I do with the greatest difficulty. God knows how I love Augustus, and what pain it has always given me to thwart him, even in trifles.—With what pride, too, could

I now retail his just praises by the hour!—I feel, that your presence has preserved his life. I also feel, that your loss might end it. And yet I am compelled to tell you, that you ought to part."

"Oh! no, dear Lady Ormsby," said Matilda; "Why must we part? I am sure, that not a word has ever passed between us, that you might not yourself have heard—not a sentiment you could have disapproved."

"Ask your heart," said Lady Ormsby, "if you may venture so to vouch for its feelings. As yet, you are innocent in word and deed; but are you so in thought? Does not this excessive unwillingness to part, itself prove that there is one for whom you are indulging a preference inconsistent with your duties as a wife?"

"A wife!" said Matilda; "Yes, I am a wife; and all I have suffered, all I ever shall

suffer, is a just punishment upon one, who, having loved Augustus Arlingford, could ever marry another. Forgive me, dearest Lady Ormsby," said she, checking herself; "it is very wrong of me to talk thus. I do not mean to complain of the consequences of my own folly; but you know not all I endured before I could be brought to be false to Augustus—to myself.—The artful incidental confirmations of his pretended fickleness—the offended presence of my only relation—the absence of any real friend—and the insidious persuasions of one who then wore the semblance of friendship, and in whom I then implicitly confided;—all these——but why," continued she, after a pause, "why should I attempt to extenuate my infatuation?—Excuse, indeed, it is worse than none,—that I then knew not the real character of him to whom I have tied myself for life; for, whatever his merit might have been,

I now feel that I should still have lived to regret a fate, of which the blame, as well as misery, must rest with myself."

"Not entirely," resumed Lady Ormsby; "those who first neglected, and then perverted such a charge, have much to answer for. I do not underrate the difficulties in which you were placed during my unlucky absence from the country. I only regret that the choice you inadvertently made, should be one which has increased, a hundred fold, those difficulties. But why dwell on this part of the unhappy subject? What I am anxious that you should be made aware of, and my chief inducement for venturing to talk with you on the subject at all, is, that even in such a cheerless lot as yours, there are consolations to be looked for, in the serene evening of life, from higher sources than those of this world. I never like to speak of myself; and it is most

of all painful to do so on the subject which I am now about to mention to you: but I, too, have had my trials, though they were very different, and, I will own (which is much for me to do), very inferior to yours. Yet, through them all, I was supported by the strength of early religious impressions. You must have heard that I was, when very young, married to poor Ormsby. He was then the gayest of the gay. No man more *recherché*, but no man more libelled. He was called a *vaurien*,—a *roué*,—and every thing that was dissipated and unsteady. You may imagine, that my marriage with him was much disapproved by all the more serious part of my family; but I had confidence in his affection; was my own mistress; and consented to become his wife. To say that he never gave me uneasiness, would be to conceal the truth.

Had I taken the line that would have been prescribed by some over-rigid moralists, I should never have possessed any influence over him, and his preference would probably have perished with the first transport of his passion. But I entered into all his tastes and pursuits, without ever neglecting any of my own more serious duties; till I gradually obtained his confidence, and succeeded in shewing him, that it was not incompatible to be at once both gay and good. At length, upon religious subjects, his mind gradually assumed a more healthy tone; and when, in the hey-day of happiness, a cruel fever deprived me suddenly of his adored presence, I had, at least, the consolation of thinking, that, through my means, his mind had been as much prepared for his untimely end as any of us frail mortals can presume to pretend

for ourselves, or to hope for others. This reflection, which has alone supported me through the dreary pilgrimage which succeeded to that short allowance of happiness, I again repeat, I owe to the benefits of an early religious education. This advantage was denied to you; and I own, that, when I consider the peculiar hardships of your married lot, Ormsby's impetuous passion, and your too tender hearts, I tremble for my children."

"Oh! dear Lady Ormsby," said Matilda, "think not that I can ever do any thing that can render me unworthy of you and of Emily."

"My dear affectionate child," replied Lady Ormsby, "warmly as I feel for you, and sensible as I am that your partiality for us is sincere and heartfelt, I should wish that your security rested on a *firmer* basis. It is not the approbation of any female friend, however

valued, that can protect you from danger so imminent. That protection must be sought from higher sources. That your mind may be prepared to receive it, will be my constant prayer; and——"

The further admonitions of this excellent woman were here interrupted by the still feeble voice of Ormsby, summoning them to the next room, as his usual repose had been shortened by his anxiety to see as much as possible of his mother, on this her last day; which anxiety, unfortunately, prevented Lady Ormsby from having any further opportunity of renewing those exhortations, which might have been most useful to Matilda; and, therefore, with a hurried and affectionate farewell, and a heart full of too-well-founded fears, she was obliged to leave her to her fate.

CHAPTER XXII.

Too truly had Lady Ormsby foreseen the gathering dangers of Matilda's situation. As Ormsby gradually recovered, it was doubly difficult to see, unmoved, the reviving lustre of those speaking eyes, which seemed brightening only to gaze on her, or to hear without emotion the swelling tones of that melodious voice, whose restored power seemed given but to add to the fervour of his impassioned admiration. It was hard to turn from this, to the petty peevishness of him to whom alone she ought to listen with delight, or to the vacant stare of that unmeaning face on which alone she ought to look with love.

Delightful was the dream in which Ormsby and Matilda were now indulging, but of which

they neither looked back to the origin, nor foresaw the end. But from this intoxicating pleasure they were soon to be awakened, by that which had latterly added to their enjoyment, but which also warned them of its end, —namely, Ormsby's recovery; which seemed no longer to leave any excuse for his delaying to quit Sir James's palazzo, and return to his own lodging. It was settled, indeed, that he should do so, after the first airings which he was permitted to take.

This excursion, it was arranged, should comprise a ramble in the Pamphyli Doria Gardens, which the temptation of real spring weather induced all the party to be desirous of exploring.

Sir James, who was always impatient at being thwarted in trifles, expressing his vexation that, on so fine a day, he should have to wait for Matilda (who had made an engage-

ment on that morning to sit for her bust), Mrs. Mechlin immediately suggested that Sir James, Colonel Canteen, and herself, should start at once on their ramble, and leave Lord Ormsby (who ought not to remain out so long) to call for Matilda at the sculptor's, and meet them at the Gardens.

To this Ormsby could not consent more readily than did the Baronet; and Matilda, being already from home, was not a party consulted. When Ormsby alone, therefore, attended her at the sculptor's, she certainly did not think it necessary to volunteer any fictitious objection to an arrangement in which her opinion had never been asked. To the Pamphyli Doria therefore they went, and there they were left long to loiter alone on this, the last day which remained to them of that unrestrained intercourse in which circum-

stances had recently permitted them to indulge.

The time and place seemed not only peculiarly to harmonise with the state of their mutual feelings, but to be even emblematical of the deceitful dangers of their relative situation. It was one of those delicious days when Nature's self seems new; and here, on this favoured spot, whose refined solitudes are purposely elevated above the grosser cares of the lower world, its sunshiny smile tempts a lingering stay, and soothes into oblivion of all but the present pleasure. But, alas! *malaria's* deadly poison hovers in every balmy breath that whispers love, and destruction lurks beneath the budding hopes of each opening flower.

Matilda and Ormsby had lingered long near one of those lonely fountains which adorn

some of the varied vistas of the Gardens. Even in his eyes she had never looked more lovely. The simple attire to which, as best suited to a statuary's classical taste she had confined her morning's toilet, was peculiarly calculated to invest her perfect form with an almost aërial grace; whilst the tranquil indulgence of the softer feelings of her nature gave a matchless expression of tenderness to her angelic features. But as she bent her eyes towards him who occupied all her thoughts, and met his adoring gaze, she felt suddenly struck with the change which his recent severe illness had made in his fine manly beauty; and it recalled her mind from the calm enjoyment of the present moment, and enforced the recollection, of how much of their late re-union they had owed to sickness and to suffering,—how, in his sunken eye and faded cheek, the traces of the melancholy

origin of their transitory pleasure were left to survive the advantages they had derived from so unwelcome a cause.

Touched with these reflections, as she leant on the marble balustrade, and shook, as she struggled for composure, her purposely-averted head, a few drops which had gathered in her full dark eye fell unbidden,—mingling, in their sullen fall, with the playful patter of the merry fountain over which she was bending.

Neither this agitation, nor the attempt to conceal it, were lost upon Ormsby; who said, as he gently pressed her hand, and leant forward so as to catch a glimpse of her still averted features, "Can Matilda seek for sympathy in her sorrows from these babbling waters, and deny her confidence to one in whom silence cannot be mistaken for insensibility?"

As, in silent reply to this, she slowly turned upon him her swimming eyes, and dropping her head on his arm, wept bitterly, Ormsby could no longer contain himself.

" Beloved Matilda," he said, " all further restraint is impossible. Think not that I can so long have beheld, unmoved, all your unmerited misery.—Can one who adores you—who feels alike the matchless power of all those blended charms, whose perfect union fancy's wildest flight could not reach—can such a one bear to see your beauties wasted on a being as incapable of estimating their value as he is unworthy of retaining their precious possession? When I thought the misery of separation was all my own, in silence did I drag the oppressive load of anguish. But when I see, that whilst you are lost to one who lives but in your happiness, that happiness itself is the daily sacrifice of circumstances which

ought not and need not to have existed, I can no longer withstand that irresistible impulse, that attractive sympathy, which from earliest youth marked us for each other. Mine you must be,—mine alone—mine for ever."

"Hold, in mercy hold, Augustus," said Matilda; "it would be vain to deny that the love I once vowed to you has never been another's.—Events have been fated to revive feelings, which, alas! had never been effaced;—my home, ever a cheerless one, has been by you rendered doubly dreary, for my peace of mind is broken—my self-esteem lost.—That I may not be deprived of all that is left of consolation and innocence, I feel that we must part; yes, this very hour. Leave me, in pity leave me!"

"Never!" said Lord Ormsby; "our guilt, if guilt there be, rests on their heads who conspired by base unworthy arts to separate us—to separate those whose mutual vows had

in all but form united them. These bonds which hold you now, forged in falsehood, and riveted with wanton cruelty, and for mere worldly views, can never force asunder hearts which the purest passion had previously cemented."

"Do not, dear Augustus, condescend to arguments, the shallow sophistry of which cannot deceive even my warped and willing mind. What avails it, how happy we once might have been! What is, alas! matters more. I am now the wife of another. If I cannot in spirit fulfil all the various duties of that station, I must to the letter obey the obligations I have contracted. In the guilt of their utter abandonment the world will not, and ought not, to admit fancied distinctions. Think you that I could ever endure to exchange approving smiles for scornful sneers? Little could I bear the contemptuous avoid-

ance of the virtuous—still less the cold and forced endurance of an unfriendly family circle. Your saint-like mother, and the dear, innocent Emily,—could I bear their just reproaches—not the less cutting because clothed in kindness?—Oh, Augustus, I shame to think that we so long have parleyed on such a subject. Believe me, our only safety is in separation."

"First, one moment, hear me," said Lord Ormsby, with a violence of emotion which, flushing his cheek and sparkling in his eye, superseded for the moment all traces of recent languor. "Never can I survive such a sentence—'twould have been but merciful to have spared me this last pang, inflicted by a conviction of that insensibility which could alone have dictated such cold calculations! Why was not the moment when I met you wounded, allowed to be my last? Why have

you banished that bright vision on which my eyes could have closed in peace? Why efface the recollection of that impassioned sympathy which then endeared death itself?"—"Merciful heaven!" interrupted Matilda, "this violence will kill you."

She had been checked in her attempt to leave him, by the apprehensions excited by the sight of his ungoverned passion; and her alarm increased, as she beheld the fleeting flush of excitement succeeded by a death-like paleness, and caught his hand just as the support of the balustrade alone prevented him from falling prostrate.

This sight revived her tenderness. 'Twas now impossible to leave him; and, avoiding the agitating topics which had been so hurtful, they were still seated on the grassy slope, she anxiously watching his reviving colour,—when they were seen from the terrace above

by the rest of the party. The *custode* who was shewing the wonders of the gardens was the first to observe them; and, with that poetical feeling peculiar to the lower class of his countrymen, was struck with so appropriate a group in so beautiful a scene.

"*Ah, che coppia bella! sembra degna d' un tal paradiso!*" exclaimed he. "Hum! more like the first tempter, or a snake in the grass," muttered Mrs. Mechlin, as, speaking half to herself, she nevertheless directed the attention of both the Baronet and Colonel Canteen to the *tête-à-tête* on the bank below.

"What was that?" said Sir James, who, as it has been mentioned, did not understand one word of Italian. "What did the man say?"

"Oh, nothing," said Mrs. Mechlin, "only this pastoral Pistrucci was inspired by this garden of Eden to *improvvisare* a paraphrase

of Milton. He has found, it seems, an Adam and Eve there :—

> ' The loveliest pair
> That ever since in love's embraces met.'

I am at best but a bad hand at a quotation.—There is something, I know, about sons and daughters, which don't signify—but

> ' Under a tuft of shade, that on a green
> Stood whispering soft ; by a fresh fountain side
> They sat them down.'

That's appropriate enough, you must own."

" It 's all d——d nonsense," said Sir James, a little sharply, and much to the astonishment of his female companion, who could not but be a little surprised at any appearance of emotion on his part, at her playful allusion to a flirtation which had long been so obvious to her scandal-seeking eyes, that she had given him credit for fashionable indifference on the

subject; otherwise, though not ever partial to Lord Ormsby, nor so fond of Matilda as formerly, she would have been the last to have risked any thing that might by possibility tend to an *escalandre*, which would endanger the permanence of an establishment that was so convenient to herself.

But if jealousy is sometimes "light as air," it is also as unaccountable as the wind, as to "whence it cometh." From an unintelligible calm upon the subject of Matilda's and Ormsby's intimacy, Sir James seemed suddenly as causelessly agitated by a rising storm of passion, without any apparent provocation; and, when they joined them on the green below, and he was informed by Lady Matilda, that the invalid had suffered much from over-exertion, he could not contain himself sufficiently to return a tolerably civil answer; but, hurrying Matilda away under pretence that

it was late, and they had long been looking for them, he insisted upon Mrs. Mechlin and Colonel Canteen accompanying them home in his carriage, and left Ormsby alone in the other to find his way to his solitary lodgings.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Heavily hung the hours, as Matilda, without the accustomed charm of Ormsby's society, was left a prey to Sir James's increasing peevishness, which was doubly irritating to a mind not entirely free from feelings of self-reproach as to her recent conduct. On the morning immediately succeeding the scene which was last described, being somewhat relieved by the temporary absence of Mrs. Mechlin, who was gone with a party to Frascati, she had, in the course of her solitary rambles, sought in Saint Peter's an escape from the world and from herself.

It is just at that hour when all is bustle and business without, that these splendid solitudes are most imposing. In the interval of the

pomp of fixed religious observances, nothing is heard from aisle to aisle but the muttered prayer of the lonely penitent.

I have said that Matilda's religious education had been neglected. Her family had formerly been Catholics. Her uncle was the first who, for political purposes, had renounced the creed of his fathers. Left in early infancy to his exclusive management, she had been ostensibly brought up in the tenets of the Church of England; but, though Lord Wakefield always declaimed with the redoubled zeal of a convert upon the inseparable union of Church and State, Matilda observed, that he found in practice this union utterly incompatible; for not only did the State entirely monopolize his attention six days in every week, but even cheated the Church out of its seventh, as business was a never-failing excuse for neglecting the duties of that day.

With this example constantly before her eyes, and no better principles instilled into her mind, it is not surprising that the time Matilda had spent with her governess at her parish church had not been so profitable as it might otherwise have been.

But though, from her defective education, religious impressions were not powerful enough to operate as an effective controul upon her conduct, yet had they always strong hold upon her imagination; and she never entered this solemn sanctuary without reverential awe, nor left it without feelings purified and chastened, and a mind elevated by salutary reflection.

Far be it from me to underrate the peculiar purity of our reformed worship, or the simplicity of its energetic eloquence,—which, disdaining alike unmeaning mystery or ostentatious mummery, trusts alone to reason and to truth.—But it may perhaps admit a doubt,

whether, by thus rejecting the adventitious aid of the imagination, Protestantism may not, in avoiding scrupulously the chance of leading astray, at the same time have somewhat limited its means of persuading to right. That is a most praiseworthy practice, which collects the Protestant parish to periodical devotion and rational prayer, where every religious exercise may be tried by the test of reasoning; and where, though the congregation are carefully and devoutly attired all in their best, the Church itself is scrupulously stripped of all extraneous ornament, lest the eye should divert the mind from its abstraction. But perhaps it may not be a less acceptable sight, to behold the splendid temple of Saint Peter's, always open to the poorest and the meanest, who, without any attention to their own outward appearance, may at once lose the consciousness of their

grovelling cares, in the feeling that here, even in the centre of one of the most magnificent works of men, they may, on an equality with the highest and the proudest, in their own words, and at their own time, offer up their voluntary vows. And if the grand monuments of art around, work upon the outward senses of the devotees, and the imagination should therefore have its share in exciting the feelings of religion, the want of the comparative purity of the source from whence those feelings are derived, may perhaps be compensated by the greater numbers over whom their power may extend.

But let us return from this, perhaps unnecessary digression, and attend our heroine in her solitary ramble. As, occupied in her own reflections, she wandered round the still deserted aisles, her attention was attracted by the figure of a monk, who, in an attitude of

fixed devotion, was kneeling before an altar, over which was represented the Adoration of the Magi. She hardly knew why she remarked him. There was nothing peculiar in the garb of his order. His bold determined features, and strongly-marked countenance, might be merely characteristic of his country, which of course she supposed to be Italian. Yet was there an expression of suffering, not unmingled with self-reproach, which seemed to individualise the peculiar interest his appearance excited.—Little, however, was Matilda prepared for the extraordinary effect that was produced on the monk, when, as she repassed the spot where he was kneeling, his eye for the first time met hers. The change that this produced in his whole deportment, was so sudden and appalling, that she could only attribute it to insanity; and turning hastily away, she was hurrying from him,

when she found, not without trepidation, that he followed her with increasing eagerness. Still greater was her surprise, when, as he approached, in a tone of earnest entreaty, he addressed her in English,—" Lady, one moment turn! Matilda, I implore you."

Though considerably alarmed, her presence of mind did not desert her, as she demanded to know what one of his order could want with her, and how he, a stranger, knew her name?

He answered, " That which I gave at yonder font, I needs must know again. Nay, more—though I grieve to speak it, Delaval is or was your name.—Better than yourself I know you."

Matilda was perfectly bewildered at this incoherent, yet convincing manner, in which he proved he was not a perfect stranger to herself and family; and she could only reply,

by inquiring when he had seen her before. "'Tis long," answered he, "that I have in vain prayed for the blessing this hour has brought. At length my prayers are heard. If you are still as pure and free from worldly pride as when you first received the name by which I but now ventured to address you—if you are in mind as in person, as perfect a prototype of her in whose arms I last beheld you—then will the tale I have to tell enhance your happiness, whilst it mitigates my misery. But if, as much I fear"——

At this moment, the monk was interrupted by the distant chaunt of a priestly procession, which was approaching the spot where they were standing. He seemed to dread being seen engaged in a conference which was probably contrary to the rules of his order, and advancing for one moment close to Matilda, he muttered, "I dare no longer stay; but

by your love of justice I conjure you, meet me here to-morrow at dusk. What your present lot is, I know not. If there is one who as a right claims your confidence, suspend it but a few short hours, till my singular tale is told. Till to-morrow's dusk be silent, and be secret. Chasten your heart from love of pomp and pride; for I can give, and I can take away—can enrich your heart, and beggar your hand."

One lingering look he cast upon his astonished companion, as, drawing his cowl closer round his head, he was lost to her amongst the crowd which accompanied the coming procession.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Whil'st Matilda slowly left the church, and indeed, during the whole of her drive homewards, she in vain endeavoured to form some probable conjecture, as to the character of the strange being with whom she seemed so unaccountably connected, or as to the nature of the communication he had promised. Sometimes she half persuaded herself that it was a maniac, who, availing himself of some accidental acquaintance with the name of herself and family, owed the rest to his own disordered imagination. But, on the other hand, the singular reserve which it has been remarked always appeared on the part of her uncle, as to any inquiry respecting the incidents of her early life, had always struck

even her unsuspicious mind as extraordinary, and had served to keep alive a conviction, that there was some family secret which had been concealed from her. She therefore determined to comply with the request of the mysterious monk for another interview; and she was still revolving in her mind the best means of effecting it at the hour he had mentioned, and without suspicion; when, upon her return home, her thoughts were diverted into another channel by the communication, on the part of Mam'selle Felicie, of another equally unexpected event.

"Oh, Miladi! of all the world, who think you shall be arrived?"—"Who, Felicie; Madame Hilas, with my gown? Have I kept her waiting?"

"Oh, no, Miladi!—of all the world, the guard of the chase, at Delaval."

"Who, pray?"

" The—Bah !—the what's-you-call game-keeper, Monsieur Boulby."

Strange as it may seem, Felicie's intelligence was literally true. Old Dick Boulby, seeing, in despair, that from the progress rapidly making in the new rail-road, the utter destruction of Delaval Park was inevitable, unless prevented by higher authority than any he had it in his power to exert, and his own snug lodge, in which he had been born, falling one of the first sacrifices to the new improvement, had formed the resolution of finding out his master and mistress, wherever they might be; though he had never in his life been further from Delaval Park than to the neighbouring quarter sessions, to assist at the prosecution of a poacher. Yet, in execution of his plan, he proceeded, per coach, to London, and hearing there that Sir James was at Rome, he availed himself of the facilities for the furtherance of

locomotive propensities, provided in Piccadilly; where, with a single stroke of the pen, a traveller is booked indifferently for Naples or for Knightsbridge.

Once started, he was faithfully handed from courier to courier, like a bale of goods; and he now stood before Sir James, even as he had left Delaval Park,—a figure more strange to Roman eyes than any the carnival had produced,—in green plush jacket, red waistcoat, and corduroys: the only change his dress had undergone consisting in his cumbrous white beaver having been exchanged for a light jean travelling-cap, at the instance of his companion, the courier, whose nose the former had sorely incommoded during his uneasy slumbers.

We may pass over the first astonishment of Sir James at this unexpected arrival; and also his insinuation, that the old fool must have

been mad, to presume to trouble him at such a distance, on such a subject. At last, however, provoked at the pertinacity with which Dick Boulby argued upon the profaneness of destroying "our" old place, his master desired him, somewhat sharply, to hold his tongue.

"Haud my tongue!—Like enough I've comed all this way to haud my tongue!—Haud my tongue!—Like enough I've sit ten days, cheek by jowl with a Mounseer, mumchance, just thinking about nothing but how I'd tell you a bit of my mind, to haud my tongue at the end on't!—Lord! Lord! I thought no good would come of your taking my Lady out of old England. But even in these here outlandish parts, I've never seed any thing like that piece of work you're making in our park."

"Come, Sir," said Sir James, "if you are to be allowed to remain in my service (which is

a favour you don't deserve) you must learn to treat your master with more respect."

"Remain in your service! How *can* I remain?—when you wo'nna keep your park, how can I be your park-keeper?—How can I be your game-keeper, when all't'game you'll have left will be black game, in shape of coal-carts?—After opening lodge-gate, man and boy, these sixty years to my Lord's friends, do you think as I will take money at your toll house?—Lord! Lord! to think how things have turned out!" Ah!" added he, with a kind of despairing head-shake, "if my Lady had but married Lord Ormsby (as we all hoped,) this would never have happened."

"Lord Ormsby," said Sir James, hastily; "what's that you say about Lord Ormsby?"

"Why, if you mun have the truth, when she were to ha' married Lord Ormsby (then

the Honourable Augustus Arlingford,) there was'na two opinions in all the country side; auld and young were ready to shower blessings on their handsome heads. But when *you* comed, and we were all told you had plenty of pelf in your pocket, tho' we never seed ony of it, we shook our heads, and partly mistrusted how it would be."

"Do you mean," said Sir James, "that you insolent bumpkins presumed ever to suppose that Lord Ormsby was ever going to marry Lady Matilda?"

"Presumed to suppose?—I loike that. Why, be that news to you? Why, I thought every fool knowed that."

The violence of the various emotions which this unexpected communication excited in Sir James, was too powerful for utterance, and he turned in silence away for a moment; when at the same instant, Matilda entered, and not

observing the Baronet, kindly welcomed the early friend of her childhood; and the pleasure he derived from the sight of his hereditary mistress, in a moment restored the somewhat ruffled serenity of the ancient dependant.

"You must be very much fatigued with such a tremendous journey," kindly inquired Lady Matilda.

"Thank you, my Lady;—why it has made my old bones dance rarely. I doubt if I'se ever loike to get a chair to sit still wid me again. If I do but try a moment, they all go wabble-wabble, noddle-noddle, like that great leather case as I've been swinging in this week past."

Any further account of Dick Boulby's journey was suspended, by Sir James, in a voice of suppressed passion, desiring Matilda to follow him into the next room.

"So, Madam!" Sir James began; "you

have so long escaped detection that you have probably been flattering yourself there would be no end to the perfect security with which it suits you to combine the substantial advantages of my wealth and station, with the less solid sentimental pleasures of your early passion."

"Sir James," said Matilda with dignity, "I am at a loss to conceive your meaning, while thus degrading yourself by insulting me."

"Well, Madam," said Sir James, "I am content to abide by your own answer to one or two questions. Was Lord Ormsby once your accepted lover? and if so, why was the fact concealed from me? and what defence can you make for your late encouragement of him?"

Matilda calmly replied, "Now that your inquiries, however the same in substance, are stripped of their offensive coarseness, I will readily answer them to the best of my power.

True it is that long before I knew you, a growing partiality between Lord Ormsby and myself was encouraged by both our families. Circumstances however intervened, which put a final period to all thoughts of that connexion; and at the earnest instance of my guardian, I was induced to listen to your addresses. It was then my uncle's special command that no mention should be made of my previous half-formed engagement. Whether right or wrong, it certainly was in opposition to my own wish at the time that I then obeyed his orders on this point. Since our marriage I will be judged by yourself, whether you have ever encouraged those terms of unlimited confidence, which could alone justify me, at any later period, in unnecessarily reviving a subject in which not alone my own feelings were concerned, but those also of another, towards whom my conduct had not been entirely free from reproach.

As to your last accusation, that of having latterly encouraged Lord Ormsby's attentions—a moment's reflection must have called to your recollection how perfectly unfounded it is—on the contrary, how studious my avoidance of him had for some time been; indeed, so much so, as to excite your own observation. And as to the circumstance which latterly led to the renewal of our intimacy,—common gratitude to him might have made you remember how little share I had in its origin."

There was a calm air of offended dignity about Matilda, as she thus answered her husband's violence, which seemed to stagger even his suspicions; and at this moment they were interrupted by the entrance of Sir James's own servant, with whom curiosity was a constitutional vice, and who, hearing this domestic storm, could not resist a desire to find out the cause, and therefore took the first opportunity

to intrude himself—holding in his hand, as his excuse, the very sketch-book which Lady Matilda had missed at Geneva.

"Lord Ormsby's servant, my Lady," said he, "left this book with some other things of his Lordship's. Angelo says, it was lost that day that your Ladyship met Lord Ormsby at the villa near Geneva, and he supposes his Lordship took it by mistake."

"What? said Sir James, almost breathless with rage,—"you met Lord Ormsby at Geneva, and never mentioned it to me? Is it so?"

"It is," said Matilda.

"Then are all my suspicions confirmed. Prepare, Madam, to leave Rome before sunrise. The horses at five o'clock, Clarke."

On this he left the apartment, and Matilda did not again see him till the carriage was at the door.

When thus left alone, that high spirit which had supported her under the late trying scene, did not survive the necessity for its exertion; and she abandoned herself, without further effort, to all the despair which her present gloomy prospects seemed inevitably to entail. She had justly repelled the imputation of habitual and practised deceit, which Sir James's utter ignorance of her character could alone have induced him even in passion to insinuate; yet she could not deny to herself, that the suspicion of her criminal attachment was but too well founded,—feeling, as she did, that of all the circumstances which rendered this sudden and disgraceful departure from Rome odious to her, that for which alone she grieved was the separation from Ormsby.

I am anxious to dwell as little as possible on the painful details of this part of my story,

—the leading events of which I shall therefore record as concisely as possible. At five the next morning, Sir James, in obstinate execution of his hastily-formed determination, hurried his unhappy wife away from Rome, regardless of the effect which such a precipitate and unexplained departure might have, in giving credit to reports injurious to her character or to his own honour; and during their tedious journey to Florence, Matilda had to submit to every species of ill-treatment, short of actual violence, which a vulgar mind and unfeeling nature, under the irritation of supposed injury, could inflict.

As soon as Lord Ormsby discovered that the Dorntons had so abruptly quitted Rome, he madly followed; and it was just one week from their last eventful meeting in the Pamphyli Doria Gardens, that, at the conclusion

of a stolen interview at the Villa Strozzi at Florence, Matilda, unable any longer to bear the barbarity of her husband, or to resist the ardour of her lover, faltered out her faint consent to an immediate elopement.

A few hours brought them to Leghorn; where they embarked for Naples; and, as the vessel receded from the shore, they felt that this speck on the surface of the waters contained all that in the wide world was left to either of them.

Thus in an unguarded moment, by this one act, had one of the most virtuous of her sex fallen from the topmost heights of rank and reputation down to the level of the most wretched outcasts from society. Born to be the representative of an ancient name and family, she was now reduced to borrow from courtesy a doubtful appellation. She had exchanged the eager seeking of would-be

acquaintances, for the studied avoidance of former friends; and, what alone to her sensitive mind added tenfold anguish to all these humiliations, she was doomed to feel that she deserved them.

CHAPTER XXV.

Truth compels me to admit, that that self-inflicted punishment, which is the usual concomitant of guilt, did not in this instance immediately follow Ormsby's and Matilda's fall from virtue. If this admission should be considered dangerously at variance with the strict moral doctrine on the subject, let the reader only suspend his judgment till my tale is told.

During the whole of their prosperous flight, light and buoyant as the bark that bore them were the hearts of the fugitives, and boundless as the bright expanse of sunshiny waters around seemed their happiness. At the conclusion of the voyage, they exchanged the comparative confinement and restraint of their

vessel, for ever-varied rambles through the lonely environs of Sorrento; where, in that most beautiful corner of the most beautiful bay in the world, they had taken a villa for the summer. Here, whilst days untold swelled into weeks, and weeks that passed unheeded made up months—eternal as the smiling skies above, and fruitful as the teeming earth on which they trod, still seemed their love. But not more certain was the revolution of the seasons, than this delicious dream to have an end.

The first thing that at all awakened them, even so far as to allow either recollections or anticipations in the least to interfere with the all-engrossing present, was the receipt of a pacquet of letters, which one of their servants brought across the bay from their banker at Naples. Of these I shall transcribe two. The first was from Lady Ormsby.

" If I have so long delayed writing, it was literally that I knew not how to begin. My heart is too full to allow me to write about any thing which I do not feel, and how can I dwell on that which alone occupies my mind? If your conduct has shown how little influence I retained, reproaches will not now restore it. If your own hearts do not tell you how much you have made me suffer, it would be no consolation to me to detail my humiliated feelings. I was a foolish vain old woman. I loved the world but for its praises of you both. If I could now, by avoiding it, escape its sneers, the sacrifice to myself would be small indeed. But a paramount duty towards a daughter who deserves every thing from me, prevents such a step, and at the same time, precludes me from holding open or constant communication with you whilst living as you now are. My sole object, therefore, in writing to you

now, is to let you know, that in sickness or in sorrow, my children will still find an affectionate mother in

" Emily Ormsby."

The other letter was of a very different character. It was from Mrs. Mechlin, and dated Florence.

" My dear Matilda—How could you take so imprudent a step? You completely mistook the management of Sir James. You should have flattered—not have *brusquéed* him. With proper treatment such a husband would have been as blind as love itself; and a husband's protection is, under any circumstances, a very great convenience. Sir James, they say here, has doubts about trying for a divorce; as, from the singular manner in which your fortune was settled, the lawyers tell him, that he would lose it by doing so,

and that he may otherwise keep it. Harry Wordsworth, who is here, as affected as ever, and making as many bad jokes, says, the Baronet is the luckiest man in the world; for that most men who marry heiresses reverse his lot—lose the land, and keep the lady. You will be glad to learn, that all the women here are ready to kill you for carrying off Ormsby, as his was a beauty *che ha fatto furore*, last time he was here. Don't mention my writing to you, my dear, as you know it might hurt me rather in the éyes of some people; and Prudence is âlways my motto. But you may depend upon my telling you any thing that I think will interest you. By-the-bye, long muslin sleeves are much worn. The *crépées* still continue. Harry Wordsworth says, what with stiffened locks and starched sleeves, it is hard to tell a beauty from a bishop.

"Your's ever,

"Caroline Mechlin."

The first of these letters, which was addressed to Ormsby, he was very anxious to conceal from Matilda; well knowing how much pain it would give her,—peculiarly sensitive as she would be to any censure from one she valued so highly as Lady Ormsby. Having therefore finished his mother's letter before Matilda had spelt through Mrs. Mechlin's more illegible scrawl, he thrust it, without comment, into his pocket; and when Matilda, having at length finished her own letter, questioned him about his, he was occupied with some less interesting contents of the pacquet; the accumulated directions on whose overloaded backs proved that they had followed him from Rome to Florence, and again from Florence to Naples.

One of these was from his lawyer, stating that his interests would suffer materially, unless he could, for very particular business,

return to England before Trinity Term. This, of course, was now entirely out of the question. Another was from his land agent, as to renewing leases on Lady-Day, and cutting down a wood before the sap was up; a third from a club acquaintance, giving an account of all the gossip of the gay world, and assuring him he was much missed in England; again, another from a political friend, asking his opinion as to bringing on a question of the first importance, in which he had formerly taken a leading part.

Not one of these subjects of interest could, for one moment, enter into the smallest comparison with the all-engrossing happiness he felt in possessing Matilda. But it is hard to find that man who, as a matter of abstract choice, and unhesitating preference, would willingly abandon for ever the world and all its attractions. Woman, warm-hearted, self-

sacrificing woman, will often view all the manifold vicissitudes of fortune, only as reflected through the medium of one beloved object. But with man, love rarely is, and still more rarely ought to be, the sole exclusive business of life.

Ormsby had, in early youth, mingled much in the gayest and busiest scenes. All resources lose their zest upon constant repetition; but he was not one of those who mistake a temporary repletion of the pleasures of society for a growing distaste towards them, nor had it ever entered into his contemplation to make positive vows of giving up the world. But accident had renewed his acquaintance with Matilda, the recollection of whom he had never ceased to cherish. His first passion had been revived with all the fervour he had formerly felt in the freshness of youth. The apparent impracticability of

the pursuit, had, perhaps, contributed to the exclusive eagerness with which, sacrificing every other consideration, we have seen him devote himself to it. It is no less justice to him, than to Matilda, to say, that so far from possession having abated his love, it had but increased its ardour; and had it been their lot to have been honourably united in the eyes of the world, no matrimonial couple had ever closed, even their honeymoon, much less completed, as they had now done, three whole months, with more certain symptoms of the permanence of their mutual happiness. But a woman like Matilda, who has sacrificed every thing for a man—who has rendered herself alike unfit for society, or for solitude—avoided by others, and avoiding herself,—such an unhappy female has a tie upon him for whom she has done all this, of a much stronger

nature than those of common married life. A virtuous wife adorns the most brilliant lot, and is the solace of occasional retirement; but a fallen companion entails an abandonment of all the pleasures, and many of the duties, of active life. Her protector's conflicting obligations are such, that it is almost impossible for him adequately to fulfil any of them. She must be all in all to him, or he is worse than nothing to her.

And such, as yet, had Ormsby been to Matilda. But when this pacquet of letters at once opened to him, as it were, the social budget,—shewing him all the various claims the world still had on him—the validity of which he had formerly acknowledged, and of the incompatibility of which, with his present situation, he could not but be sensible,—the serenity of his recent enjoyment, which had

owed its existence to the oblivion of every thing but present happiness, was not a little disturbed.

As they pursued their usual evening stroll through the vineyards, whose ripe burthens overhung the sloping banks, and almost touched the waters, Matilda could not but remark how much absorbed he was in his own reflections; and she at length thus broke the unusually protracted silence.

"How I do hate letters! True, I hardly ever had a pleasant one. Strange as it may seem, I do not think that I ever in my life received one from you, Ormsby."

"Do you wish me to give you a speedy opportunity of experiencing that pleasure?" said Ormsby, smiling.

"Oh! do not talk so, even in jest. I cannot bear to contemplate such a thing as possible. Besides, positive pleasure, I think,

can hardly be said to be derived from the receipt of a letter. It is at best, but a slight alleviation of the pains of absence—a poor apology for the living presence. What, compared to the ever varying sympathies of uninterrupted intercourse is it, when the heart only beats its formal and periodical response to the postman's knock? What security can we ever feel, that the interval which has elapsed before the receipt of written communications, may not have reversed all of good that they contain—that affections may not have cooled—that health may not be impaired, even whilst we are dwelling with delight upon the assurance of their continuance?"

"True," said Ormsby; "and though letters may

"Waft a sigh from Indus to the Pole,"

yet what is *such* a sigh, compared with one

felt by the actual senses—distilling its rich balm upon the heart, and breathing its low, sweet music upon the ear?"

"And if, when only written," continued Matilda, "the most endearing terms lose half their charm, how much are the reproaches of those one loves aggravated, when they thus receive a poignancy, which no affectionate look or manner interposes to soften, and a permanence which no soothing, or submission, can interfere to obliterate? The displeasure of our friends is doubly powerful on paper."

"It is indeed," said Ormsby, removing at the same time his hand from its grasp of his mother's letter, which he had still held in his pocket, doubtful whether he should show it to Matilda.

"The odious Post," said Matilda, "enables all these most disagreeable intruders to

annoy us with their sentiments, however we may succeed in excluding their persons."

"But at least," said Ormsby, "we may put an end to paper persecution, without committing murder. If a Neapolitan August do not furnish us with a fire to which we can condemn them, here, at least, are waters of oblivion for them;"—and taking Matilda's letter, with all his own except his mother's, he scattered them in scraps into the sea; upon whose smooth unruffled surface, mingling as they fell, the frivolous flippancy of Mrs. Mechlin long floated, undistinguished from the stiff business text of the lawyer, the rounded periods of the politician, the equally diffuse dandy, and the concise, cramped communication of the country agent.

The spot on which this little incident occurred, was the loveliest of all the lovely scene

around, and, for this reason, had often been the limit of their evening ramble. The beautiful banks of the little inlet, on one side of which they were seated, were crowned with a profusion of myrtles, acacias, and other sweet plants, which irresistibly tempted to linger within the precincts of the double enjoyment of their fragrant shade.

The vineyard path on the other side of the bay, traversed only by the light-hearted peasants, as they returned from their work, carolling some of the wild and gay melodies of their native dialect, gave occasional animation to the scene, without at all interfering with its secluded charm. On the broad extent of waters beyond, the setting sun had marked his track of liquid fire, such as no pen, and the pencil only of Claude, can describe.

I know not whether it was from the peculiar stillness of the atmosphere, and the more than

usually glass-like surface of the sea, (which will sometimes convey sound to an almost incredible distance,) but it was the first time Ormsby had remarked, that from hence they could catch the "busy hum of men," and the rumbling of the carriages, on the evening Promenade at Naples. There was something in his tone and manner in making this observation, which struck Matilda's sensitive mind as implying a wish to be there;—and in a moment her part was taken.—"Ormsby," she said, "you wish to change the scene.—For myself, Heaven knows with you I could remain for ever in this earthly paradise;—that is, with you wholly and entirely, in mind as well as person. But never through mistaken kindness attempt to disguise from me any desire you may have; for if *you* are but happy, all places are the same to me. I can have no wish, no hope, but to please you; and

my worst fear is, to be felt as a constraint on your inclinations."

Ormsby warmly protested, in reply, that he had no wish for change—that no one could be happier than he. And so at the moment he felt. But in a week they had removed to Naples!

CHAPTER XXVI.

"I NEVER can bear so public a promenade as the Villa Reale," said Matilda to Ormsby, one of the first evenings after their arrival at Naples.

"My dearest love," replied he, "let me entreat you not to take up so absurd an idea. You will distress me beyond measure, if you adopt habits of utter seclusion. It only requires a little resolution at first.—You will only have to cherish and maintain that indifference you formerly felt, for those whose prejudices may induce them to avoid you. But all whose notice you would really wish to seek, will make allowance for the peculiar circumstances in which you were involved; and in time, as my wife, I shall hope to see my

Matilda restored to that society of which she is formed to be the brightest ornament. But if, on the other hand, you are resolutely bent on shutting yourself up, you will only make *me* miserable as well as yourself."

" Dear Ormsby, though I am not convinced by your arguments, (in which I think you mistaken,) yet am I moved by the effect you threaten, and of which you alone can judge.—Make *you* miserable indeed ! No, never will I hazard any thing that can tend to that.—If it must be so, to the Chiaja let us go."

Ormsby, grateful for this concession on her part, was in high spirits, and exerted himself to dissipate the awkwardness which for the first time she felt at the universal admiration her appearance excited.

The latter end of the summer, or beginning of autumn, is perhaps the season when there

are fewest English at Naples; so that they had passed from one end to the other of the promenade, without meeting many of their countrymen, or any with whose faces they were acquainted. But, on one of the benches at the further end of the walk, Ormsby discovered a figure, stretching his lazy length along, and devouring an English newspaper, which he recognised to be that of his old acquaintance Harry Wordsworth, whose arrival in Italy, it may be recollected, was notified in Mrs. Mechlin's letter to Matilda.

Harry Wordsworth was one of those, whose universally acknowledged position in society it is extremely difficult to account for. He was the younger brother of a not very good family, with a smart figure, and pleasing, though not handsome features; in saying which, we have pretty nearly summed up all the advantages

which he really possessed, though not one hundredth part of what he had successfully assumed the credit of.

He was as poor as younger brothers usually are, yet denied himself no luxury;—professed never to do any thing he did not like, yet was reckoned the best-natured creature in the world; — superficial, almost illiterate, yet could talk *ad captandum* on any subject;— in short, without much either of fancy or feeling, a rattling merry manner with men made him pass for an uncommonly pleasant fellow, and a soft insinuating address with women gave him the reputation of being only *trop aimable*.

How he came to be thus far from the scene of all his glories, and at this unfashionable time of year, we must allow him to explain for himself, as far as may be convenient to him.

Ormsby having known him all his life, and been always accustomed, as a matter of course, to reciprocate the prescribed degree of warmth of manner upon meeting him, which was perfectly compatible with utter indifference as to ever seeing each other again, accosted him with, "Harry, how are you? what brings you here?"

At which Harry started up with "Ormsby, my dear fellow, how goes it?" and then turning towards Lady Matilda, with whom he had a very slight acquaintance, changed his manner to his most interesting drawl, and accompanied, "delighted to see *you*," with a protracted squeeze of the hand.—Then turning again towards Ormsby, and holding up the newspaper he had been reading, "Well, Ormsby," said he, "so you are going to win the St. Leger, after all?"

"*Non capisco*," said Ormsby, "though I suppose you say that figuratively, for I know most of your metaphors are in that line."

"Figuratively?—quite the reverse—I literally speak by book; to prove which, I'll back your Comus filly against any thing."

"Come, my dear Harry, you're the first that ever brought Tattersall talk to the Villa Reale.—The fact is, that I had forgotten I possessed such a thing as a Comus filly; I have not seen or heard any thing of her since she was running about the paddock at Ormsby. But you've excited my curiosity.—What have you heard about her?"

"Only what will make a man of me again," said Harry, "that d—d Derby floored me completely. She has beat the first favourite, at York, August,—holding up the newspaper,—'Lord Ormsby's bay filly by Comus, first.—The Comus filly took the lead, made

strong running, was never headed, and won easy;—two to one on Mr. Leggin's Pandemonium, who was beat early in the race.'—So Pandemonium may go to the Devil. The Comus filly will bring me home again; and if she brings me home she shall take me home, and that *presto*, as they say here, you may depend upon it.—But only think of your being such an unworthy favourite of fortune as not to recollect that you had a Comus filly!—well, if she wins the Leger, you must christen her Matilda, and then you'll no longer have any excuse for forgetting her."

There was something in this last sally of Harry Wordsworth's which grated unpleasantly on the feelings of both his hearers, particularly on those of Matilda, to whom, in her present delicate situation, the idea of her name being made a common bye-word was most odious. The fact was, that Harry

Wordsworth had rattled on inconsiderately, not from positive embarrassment, for of that at no period of his life had he ever been accused,—but from more awkwardness than he had often experienced; which arose from a certain degree of uncertainty he felt, as to how he might be received by his old friend Ormsby, owing to his having found it convenient to fix the Sunday instead of the Tuesday after the Derby, as the day of his departure for the Continent:—to which change in his original intentions, some did not scruple to say, that he was impelled by a desire to avoid the intervening black Monday at Tattersall's. He had tact enough to perceive, that his free allusion to Matilda's name was not very favourably received, and therefore turning the subject, and rattling on, he continued,—

"But upon my word, Ormsby, you are

getting to live so much abroad, you'll soon forget the difference between White's and Boodle's; and you'll be utterly unable either to discuss budding beauties at the one, or growing crops at the other."

"My good fellow," said Lord Ormsby, "absurd as that may appear to you, I have heard some people talk about quite as important matters, which they quite as little understand.—'Tis a showy superficial age. Our ancestors' solid ingots of knowledge, too heavy for most heads to carry, we have spread out into gold-leaf gossip, which glitters over the whole surface of society."

Matilda wishing to return to her carriage, Ormsby and Wordsworth now separated; the former, upon the whole, not much pleased at the meeting. The fact was, that Harry Wordsworth's manner was one to which habit had once familiarized Ormsby; but thus

unexpectedly recurring on the sudden, removed from all the associations which had conspired to render him agreeable, it left the general impression of an unwelcome intrusion.

The next morning, when Ormsby had strolled out, and Matilda was occupied with her music, Harry Wordsworth popped his black, curly head, round the partly open door, and said,—"At home, fair lady?"—in an easy, confident tone, which rather conveyed—"Here am I!" than, "Are you there?"

Matilda's manner had always been one peculiarly calculated to repress impertinence; and certainly its repulsive power was never more exerted than during the *tête-à-tête* which followed the arrival of this self-admitted visitor; but all her coldness was wasted upon the easy intruder. He lolled, by her side,

upon the sofa; and whilst conversing on indifferent subjects, occasionally fixed his eyes, with an expression of undisguised admiration, upon her beautiful face; then pressed her, with hyperbolical enthusiasm, to delight him by continuing her singing; and when, rather than listen to his rhapsodical entreaties, she calmly complied, he leant over her, and passed his arm round the back of her chair, with an air of (to her) offensive familiarity.

Much of this was habitual mannerism with him; and arose from his being, what is commonly called, a cool hand. But it struck Matilda, who was previously not much acquainted with him, as personal to herself, and arising from that want of respect which was the consequence of her present situation. Bitter were the reflections which this conviction gave rise to, and so strong was their effect upon her nerves, that she had some difficulty

in keeping up that appearance of composure which she was very anxious to maintain; when Ormsby's entrance relieved her from her unpleasant situation. Wordsworth soon after departed, after having coolly invited himself to dine with them the next day.

Ormsby was evidently in high spirits. "I told you, Matilda, that there was little doubt you might, if you chose, soon be restored to society; that there was discrimination enough in the world to make allowances for your peculiar situation; and that, after the divorce, you will gradually, but generally, be received again."

"Dear Ormsby, I have seen nothing, certainly, to alter my opinion, that it will be impossible, even if I had the hardihood to make the effort."

"Well; only let me tell you what happened to me this morning. I don't know

whether I ever mentioned to you a cousin of mine—Mrs. Laceby. She is the wife of Admiral Laceby, who is commanding our fleet off the Island of ——. She is the most rigidly strict person I almost ever heard of, and is generally supposed to possess every Christian virtue but charity. She once quarrelled with my poor mother; as even she, excellent as she is, offended some of her prejudices. Well, judge of my surprise, when, upon meeting her this morning, she accosted me immediately,—said that she had only landed yesterday from the Island of ——, and had heard, by accident, that the female part of my family were here. She hesitated a moment, and seemed to me to avoid mentioning you by name; but ended by saying, that relations ought to forget all that was past; asked me where I lived; and parted, saying that she should call here to-morrow."

" I suppose," said Matilda, " that it must have been her, then, that Mr. Wordsworth meant, when he said, he wondered how I, and my strange relation who was here, would get on together. He would not tell who she was; but laughed and said, he had no doubt she would call upon me."

Though the character given of Mrs. Laceby was not such as to make Matilda anticipate much pleasure from her acquaintance, yet, certainly, her feelings, recently wounded by what she considered Wordsworth's impertinence, were soothed by the attention implied in her intended visit.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Ormsby had engaged himself to go on the following morning to look at a house, the situation of which they thought they should prefer to that which they at present occupied. Matilda was therefore left alone to receive the expected visit of Mrs. Laceby.

From any awkward sensation of embarrassment in society, Matilda had always been peculiarly free; an exemption, the natural consequence of intuitive good breeding, and habitual usage of the world. But with her situation, her feelings had altered. Confidence, however the appearance of it may occasionally be brazened forth, cannot really exist without self-respect. Matilda's loss of caste had been too recent, and her sense of shame was too

acute, to enable her successfully to assume the appearance of that ease she no longer felt; and she had literally worked herself up into the most uncomfortable state of nervousness, whilst awaiting Mrs. Laceby's dreaded visit. Listening to catch the first sound of each successive carriage wheels, as they bowled along the smooth lava flag stones, they seemed to her to advance with unnatural rapidity; and she gave a gasp of relief, when, though hardly trusting her ears, she was convinced that each had actually passed her door.

"How can I bear to meet," thought she, "a woman whom Ormsby described as possessing every virtue, but charity; when it is only the active exercise of *that* one in particular, that could render endurable her presence to a poor fallen creature like me? I shall have to submit to the contemptuous condescension of one who, even whilst she for some family

reasons stoops to notice me, will think it necessary to mark, that the interview is disagreeable to *her*, by making it so to *me*. I think I see her before me, shrinking, as from contamination, at the slightest approach on my part. I can fancy, but too well, her severe voice, stiff figure, and constrained conversation. Would it were over!"

Whilst conjuring up these unpleasant images, a carriage actually stopped at the door; and after a delay that seemed interminable to Matilda, her Italian *servitore* entered, and announced a lady, whose name, he said, he could not pronounce, but which resembled that of my lord.

"Now for it," thought she; and she rose to receive her dreaded visitor. But great was her surprise when, instead of the stiff-starched figure, and forbidding features, which she had attributed to Mrs. Laceby, she beheld a form,

if any thing, too well rounded,—handsome, though rather coarse features—a complexion which, if entirely natural, was brilliant indeed —and a dress far from unbecoming—though showy, almost amounting to tawdriness.

Matilda had hardly time to make these observations on the appearance of her new acquaintance, before, instead of meeting her with a cold repulsive manner, she extended both hands, and kissed her cheek rather cordially than delicately. At first Matilda knew not, whether to distrust her own eyes, or to discredit Ormsby's descriptive powers, and was half-inclined to believe that there must be some mistake: when she was re-assured by her visitor, who began, " I knew that you would be at home, as soon as you heard that it was I. I was determined to call on you, because I feel for your situation ; and connected as we are, I have made up my

mind to take you in hand; for however ill I may think that I have been used by your Lord Ormsby, and some of the family, forget and forgive is my motto; and if I can be of any use to you, you may command me. I will introduce you to any society that I know of, if you like."

"Oh, by no means," answered Matilda; "I neither can expect nor wish that. But I can assure you, that I am more grateful than I can express for this attention; which I am aware, however, that I can only owe to that kindly feeling towards Ormsby, which all in the remotest degree connected with him cannot but have."

"Quite the contrary, I assure you, my dear," said her visitor; "much more for your own sake than his. I have an old crow to pick with him, as well as with his old methodistical mother."

Though Matilda had been prepared to hear Mrs. Laceby speak with dislike of Lady Ormsby, from the former quarrel,—of which Augustus supposed, from her unforgiving nature, she still retained the recollection,—yet she could not help being much astonished to hear the epithet methodistical applied to such a person.

She, however, replied, " I was sorry, indeed, to hear, that you had had some differences with Lady Ormsby, which had induced you to quarrel with *her*."

" I quarrel with her! She quarrelled with me. It was all her nonsense. Lord bless you! I'm as easy to come on with as an old glove."

At least, thought Matilda, Mrs. Laceby is not an elegant woman. Satisfied with the reputation of the higher virtues, she neglects the minor graces of society. But her manner

towards me, though somewhat abrupt, is infinitely more conciliatory than I had been led to expect.

Her new acquaintance now left the chair where she had been sitting, and, throwing herself on the sofa by her, said, "What a love of a gown that is you have got on, my dear! do let me send my maid to take the pattern. I declare, it is quite killing."

Matilda opened her eyes in mute astonishment, at the idea of a notorious prude, not only choosing to seek her society, but volunteering to copy her appearance.

"Well! don't stare so, my dear, as if I had asked something very extraordinary. I don't pretend to say that I shall look so well in it as you do. Oh, now you are going to say that you meant no such thing. But I can't stay to hear you give the lie to your countenance. I must leave you now; but

I'll introduce you to all the people I live with here. I don't know many English, except a few men; but I'll make you acquainted with the Contessa Franca Vita, la Marchesa Bellocchi, and some more of my Italian friends. I have not many beaux to lose, or else I ought not to bring you into my society; for those pretty peepers, from under their long dark lashes, will play the very deuce with the men, I can tell you."

With this, and the same warm salute with which she had entered, she left the room.

"How strange and unaccountable," thought Matilda. "I have often heard, that living much abroad is supposed to bring about extraordinary changes of manner; but to this extent I could not have believed it possible. In no one respect is she as described by Ormsby, except in her rooted antipathy to Lady Ormsby. She is very disagreeable, I

think, though not in the way I had expected. I had much rather have been lectured than fondled, by such a person."

When Ormsby returned, she did not dwell much upon the subject to him; as, having taken a dislike to her new acquaintance, she could not speak of her with pleasure; and Ormsby evidently being anxious that she should cultivate the intimacy with his relation, she rather avoided the only subject on which they had differed.

Harry Wordsworth having excused himself from dining with them, as cavalierly as he had invited himself, Ormsby and Matilda, after a short repast, followed by a long evening ramble, returned home about dusk, when the servant gave Lord Ormsby a note, which, upon opening, he found to be from Mrs. Laceby, the contents of which, at first, he could not comprehend. It began:—"Mrs.

Laceby presents her compliments to Lord Ormsby, and scarcely thinks it necessary to inform him, that it was from mistaking the person at present residing here, and calling herself Lady Ormsby, for the Dowager, that she was led into the error of inquiring where he lived, and promising a call. Mrs. L. makes the less apology for this strange mistake, as she is sure that Lord O.'s good sense must have prevented him from supposing for one moment that Mrs. L.'s regard for her own character could have allowed her to take any notice of the female who she now understands is at present residing under his protection."

"Whom, in the name of wonder, then, can you have seen this morning?" said Lord Ormsby, at once irritated and annoyed at the unexpected contents of this note.

"The Lady that was here this morning,"

said the servant, " is waiting for you upstairs in the drawing-room with Mr. Wordsworth."

Lord Ormsby ran upstairs before Matilda, and upon opening the door, found his brother's immaculate widow, Arabella Lady Ormsby, lounging familiarly on the sofa with Harry Wordsworth, who had been an old acquaintance of her's before she descended quite so low as she had done previously to her sudden elevation to the Peerage.

" Well, my good fellow," said Harry, " how late you are ! We have been waiting here for you, to give us some tea ; and now we shall miss the Opera."

For one moment Ormsby felt bewildered at so singular a situation ; but in another his resolution was taken, and addressing the fair Arabella, he said, " If your Ladyship would allow me one minute's private conversation

with you, it may perhaps spare your feelings, as well as those of this Lady," pointing to Matilda, who then entered the room.

"Oh, don't let me interfere with family secrets," said Harry Wordsworth, carelessly; "I'm for the Opera—*a rivederla*, Signora," said he to Matilda, and left the room.

But Ormsby still motioned his sister-in-law to follow him into the next apartment, and they left Matilda alone; who, from not knowing who the Lady was, did not comprehend the whole extent of the dilemma; yet, upon reading Mrs. Laceby's open note, which Ormsby had left upon the table, she perceived that there was some strange mistake, which could only end in mortification to her.

She was not left long in suspense; for the gentle Arabella soon rushed again into the room, evidently in a state of great indignation,

screaming out—" Should be careful with whom she associates!—Indeed, she should have thought of that before she went off with you. I shouldn't do her so much harm as you have, I take it. I'd have you to recollect, that I am an honest woman, and have a situation in society. I should like to know who would suffer most by the old saying of—'Birds of a feather flock together.' I was your brother's lawful wife; and if I had any children, they would have cut you out. But what will *your* brats be, if you have any?"

Lord Ormsby interrupted this tirade, by leading her gently, but firmly, to the door, and calling Lady Ormsby's carriage.

"Well," said she, as she left the room, "you shall repent this—you, and your lady who stands crying there. I won't bemean myself to call her what she is."

Bitterly did Matilda feel this, the first of those mortifications to which, even in a worldly point of view, her unhappy situation constantly exposed her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

In vain did Ormsby endeavour to efface the humiliating impressions which were left on the sensitive mind of Matilda by the interview which has just been described.

"How can you allow yourself, my dearest Matilda," said he, "to be so much moved by the vulgar ebullitions of that odious creature? That one like her should be blind to the obvious distinction between a single, almost pardonable error, and habitual vice, is not to be wondered at; nor is it surprising, that she should endeavour to reduce you to her own degraded level. Her violent temper it was to be expected would explode, when reminded of that difference between you and her, which either her depraved feelings prevented her

from perceiving herself, or her impudence induced her to expect would not be apparent to others."

"Strange instruments," answered Matilda, shaking her head, "are sometimes made use of to open our unwilling eyes to our real situation, and to remove the veil with which passion for a time has obscured our powers of self-estimation. O, Ormsby!" added she with emotion, "all that that odious woman conveyed in her own disgusting language, is but too, too true."

"Why will you say this?" said Ormsby, half provoked: "when she presumed to draw a comparison between her own infamous self, (who was at one time as low and as base as the unhappy wretches who starve in the streets), and a delicate and refined creature like you, who have only sought a refuge from intolerable oppression, under the protection of him

to whom you had plighted your first faith, from whom you had been separated by unworthy artifice, and to whom you will soon be united by indissoluble ties."

"Would that day were come," said Matilda. "To all the painful publicity attendant on the divorce would I willingly submit, if by a patient endurance of shame I might purchase an escape from sin.—For though, dearest Augustus, whilst those bright eyes beaming with love are before me, I own my guilty pleasure is great; yet in the few moments of reflection your devoted kindness leaves me, bitter is the remorse which I feel, that it is a life of sin that we are leading. She said but too truly—that woman.—Her present situation is more respectable than mine."

"I cannot bear to hear you countenance such an absurdity," said Ormsby, a little pettishly. "How can you couple respect and

her? You little know how shamefully she abused my poor brother's confidence; and I dare say, if it was worth inquiring about, that we should find her present course of life as infamous."

"May be so," replied Matilda; "if she abuses the advantages with which she has been unworthily invested, her reproach is the greater. But can you not, without being offended, make allowances for bitter regret on my part, at being obliged to own to myself that I am reduced to a situation in which her proffered acquaintance cannot be considered as an insult?"

"Offended with you I can never be," said Ormsby, at once softened. "If there was any irritation in my manner, it was only at your obstinately refusing to do justice to yourself. Look cheerful again, and you at once restore my serenity."

"Indeed, efforts to appear cheerful are never wanting on my part," Matilda replied; "for I cannot but be sensible of the great sacrifices you have made for me, and the claim which that gives you to every exertion of mine, to repay you with as much domestic comfort as a poor guilty creature, on whom the canker remorse is constantly preying, has it in her power to impart."

Ormsby knew not what to say. He took two or three hasty turns about the room, and then stood for a moment on the balcony, not knowing whether he should easiest soothe and comfort her by contending the point further, or by admitting the justice of her self-reproaches.

At last, taking his hand kindly, whilst she struggled to repress her tears, she continued,—"Forgive me if I distress you;—but one thing that woman said which sunk deep into

my heart. My shame will not end with my own wretched existence.—Oh! Augustus—I cannot bear to think that I live but to entail infamy on innocence,—that a few short months will produce a living stigma to perpetuate reproach. Let me then, while I can, revel with all a mother's fondness in those instinctive caresses which I may receive in the ignorance of infancy; for the first dawn of intelligence must teach my child to blush for her who gave it birth."

This was a subject which could not but make much impression on Ormsby.—He was not without family pride; on the contrary, though it was never offensive or obtrusive, he possessed it in a degree almost amounting to a weakness. He had often paced up and down the long gallery at Ormsby Castle, and taken a strange pleasure in studying all the noble

daubs with which it was lined, and in summing up all the illustrious links by which, without a single flaw, the ancient barony had been handed down through successive centuries. He had been unable to keep within any moderate bounds his indignation at his brother's disgraceful marriage. It was impossible, therefore, that any image more galling to his feelings could have been conjured up, than that of his and Matilda's first offspring stigmatized as illegitimate, and wandering an unacknowledged outcast from the mansion of his forefathers, whilst his own name and family would be extinct with him, and the ancient property of his house pass away to collateral strangers. —Oppressed with this idea, however anxious he was to mitigate Matilda's distress, he knew not how to begin, or what consolation to offer, when he himself felt as poignantly the full

force of her regrets. He therefore only bit his lips in silence, whilst he allowed her uninterruptedly to continue.

"More than any thing else in the world have I often envied your mother's feelings of maternal pride in you and Emily. Often have I wished that, in my declining years, I might have such a son and such a daughter, and have thought that if one was allowed me, I should not know which to choose—whether to experience the constant care and respectful attention of an attached girl, or to feast my ears from afar on the widely-spread praises of a beloved and admired boy.—But now it is but a choice of evils—whether a son shall suffer all the mortifications of forfeited rank, doubtful situation, and disputed name; or a daughter be exposed to other as bitter humiliations,—suspicion of character, and avoidance of connexion; and that either shall know that they

owe all this, which renders their existence irksome, to the sin and shame of their parents."

"Oh, too much of this, dear Matilda," said Ormsby; "I cannot bear to think of it. —But it is yet possible that such a calamity may be averted,—I am in daily expectation of hearing from London, that the proceedings preliminary to the divorce have been commenced. It is nothing but Sir James's sordid unwillingness to part with your fortune, which has so long delayed it. It is a subject of much too delicate a nature, for one to attempt to enter into any arrangement; otherwise how gladly would one facilitate the proceedings by removing his objection. 'Twas a strange will, that of your uncle."

"It was indeed," said Matilda, glad to avail herself of the relief of her excited feelings which a change of subject offered;—"and strange and mysterious seem to have been

some of the occurrences of my early life.—I mentioned, I believe casually, an extraordinary interview with a stranger monk, which happened the day previous to that in which I was hurried away from Rome. His half-hinted communications with respect to my family, which, when interrupted, he promised to complete on the morrow, made a strong impression upon my mind at the time, though almost immediately superseded by the more agitating events which followed. I cannot say how much I now regret having, I fear for ever, lost a clue to some disclosures of importance with respect to my family; which, without being able to assign any rational reason for it, I have nevertheless always unaccountably anticipated."

"Do you not think," said Ormsby, "that this very predisposed excitement of the imagination, which you acknowledge, laid you open

to the artifices of some impostor, who, availing himself of a little superficial knowledge of your family, meant to work upon your credulity for his own ends?"

"I admit," replied Matilda, "that yours is the rational way of interpreting it, to which the common sense of any but an eye-witness would naturally lead. But there is an unimpeachable truth in manner, which must be seen to be believed; and this it was which carried conviction to my mind.—Had you heard him speak of my mother, you would have felt that there was no longer room to doubt that he had known and valued her, of whose presence her unworthy daughter was deprived before she knew her irreparable loss. 'If,' said he, 'you still are pure as her in whose arms I last beheld you.' Alas! I was so then.—I must not however think of that," continued she, checking herself. "He then

seemed to hint at some communication which he had it in his power to make, which would require from me, if not fortitude to bear, at least disinterestedness thankfully to receive."

"Most thankfully should we receive it," said Ormsby, "if by discovering any flaw in the disposition of your fortune, it tended to remove the delays of which that alone is the cause, in the proceedings for the divorce. You have not yet quite removed my incredulity as to this strange adventure being any thing more than a stale trick on the part of some impostor; but at the same time I must acknowledge that my early recollections of my mother's remarks with some of her neighbours soon after the death of your father, would rather tend to confirm the suspicion that there was some mystery attending your birth.—It was never accurately known who your mother

was, any more than that it was believed she was a foreigner, to whom your father had become attached during his residence abroad, when a warm climate had been recommended for the benefit of his health. Some surprise, I have also heard, was excited by your uncle's sudden and unexplained absence from England about that time; more particularly as it was ascertained that he had not attended his brother during his last illness. All this gave rise to much gossip in the country at the time, coupled with many other circumstances which I have since forgotten, though I was then just of that age when children are allowed to hear every thing, from its being erroneously supposed they cannot understand it; and when they pick up any story, not only in its original shape in the drawing-room, but also the second edition enlarged and embellished in the nursery.

This latter part of the conversation, with its reference to past times, had so far tended to tranquilize Matilda's mind, as to render her more fit to receive the visitors by whom it was now interrupted, who were no other than Harry Wordsworth and Colonel Canteen.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Colonel Canteen had but lately arrived at Naples, where he had, in the course of his first walk, accidentally met with Mr. Wordsworth, with whom he had that sort of standing acquaintance, which in England had for years remained stationary at the silent exchange of nods in the streets, and newspapers in the clubs.—This, however, was quite enough to lead to constant companionship at Naples; and the Colonel having heard from Harry where Ormsby and Matilda were domiciliated, proposed a call there together. Colonel Canteen, as we have hinted, was a great gossip as well as *gourmand*—equally ingenious in the invention of scandal or of sauces,—and always anxious to have a finger

in the pie, in *tracasserie* as well as *pâtisserie*. But he was withal, a very high-bred gentleman, rather punctilious perhaps, and somewhat of the *vieille cour*. His manner, therefore, towards Matilda, upon this their first meeting since the elopement, was scrupulously respectful, and to her sensitive mind, formed a pleasing contrast with the free and easy familiarity of Harry Wordsworth; which latter, after all, was natural to the individual, but which she could never persuade herself did not proceed from an impertinence, which he might think her present doubtful situation sanctioned. Colonel Canteen was very anxious that she should go to San Carlo, to hear a new opera of Rossini's, which was there divinely sung by a constellation of talent rarely united in any theatre.—This proposal was warmly seconded by Harry Wordsworth, who, fixing his large languishing eyes upon

her, drawled out a protracted, "Do—pray." In spite, however, of this additional inducement, she at first positively declined it, from a dislike to appearing in public.—But when her two visitors were supported by Ormsby, who plainly shewed that he should be hurt if she did not go, she could no longer resist, and gave an unwilling consent.

Fond as she was of music, it so happened that she had never seen an opera in any of the first-rate establishments of Italy, since she left Milan. There, it will be recollected, she was so occupied with the performance, on her first visit to *La Scala*, that it was long before she observed the admiration which her appearance excited among those better accustomed than she was to the comparative darkness of an Italian Theatre. San Carlo was equally obscure; but from the moment she entered the house, she could not help fancying that from

every box the finger of scorn was pointed at her, and every whisper with which the performance was occasionally interrupted, she fancied was telling her tale of shame.

"Surely those are my old friends, the Olinskis," said Ormsby; "Madame Olinski still looking as young as either of her daughters.—'*Les Graces de la Pologne*,' they are called; for they live as well as dress, like three sisters. I must just go and see them."

Matilda followed him with an anxious eye out of the box. Jealous she could not be;—yet she did not like to find him so very happy to recognise any women; nor was she much pleased that Colonel Canteen and Mr. Wordsworth should hear him, before her, express himself so warmly in praise of what, by his own account, seemed not exactly a reputable family.—What he had said was probably

spoken lightly, but it dwelt heavily on her heart.

Such was the unfortunate situation of her box, that this was fated to be a night of mortifications; for Ormsby had hardly disappeared, and she was still occupied with her own disagreeable reflections upon it;—Colonel Canteen was telling her a long story, to which she was attempting to appear to listen;—Harry Wordsworth, who was sitting opposite to her, was making his opera-glass perambulate the house; when from the next box, immediately behind Harry's chair, a preposterous pink hat, overloaded with an infinity of feathers, was poked round, and Matilda plainly perceived the fine dark eyes of Arabella Lady Ormsby staring full upon her; and in a moment afterwards, a well-rounded arm, all bedizened with bracelets by the dozen, tapped the uncon-

scious Mr. Wordsworth's averted shoulder, and its owner addressed him with "Ah, Harry—you seem in the *wrong box* there with my would-be sister, but as yet not sister *in law*, any more than in love."

Then beckoning him closer to her, and speaking in a pretended whisper, but loud enough for Matilda to hear, (and affectedly as if to conceal her meaning, addressing him in Italian—of a superficial smattering of which she was more vain than it deserved) she added —"*Che sia il tuo dovere di far geloso quello mio maladetto fratello.*"

"*Tace! tace!*" said Harry, whose hitherto matchless assurance sunk abashed before the superior impudence of his female friend:—So true it is, that no masculine brass is at all a match for a well-bronzed woman.

Here was a striking instance of this; for to

avoid still plainer hints as to what his conduct should be, Harry Wordsworth was obliged to leave the box. The front place which he had left was immediately occupied by the Colonel, who, not finding that Matilda reciprocated conversation very readily, was glad to place himself where he could command a view of the house; and peeping into the next box on the opposite side to that from which the gay widow had shewn herself, he suddenly exclaimed, "Why, I'm sure that's the admiral. How d'ye do, Admiral? When did you arrive? How d'ye do, Mrs. Laceby?"

These inquiries were answered by a precise-sounding female voice, which asked, in return, —"Are you alone, there, Colonel?" and a long, thin neck, which seemed unused to bending, was, with some difficulty, made to insert itself into the box, and to display a most severely angular set of features, appropriately

crowned with a rigidly mathematical sort of toque. It was but the apparition of an instant; for when Mrs. Laceby's little prim gray eyes met those of Matilda, who was studiously sitting, rather concealed, this severe censor withdrew with horror, and the curtain was, at the same time, offensively pulled more closely round her, as if to preserve her from the dangers of contact to which such a neighbourhood had exposed her.

"I must just go and speak to the Admiral," said Colonel Canteen; "I have not seen him for such a time. Excuse me for one moment, Lady Matilda," he added, and left the box.

When our heroine was thus left alone, in vain she endeavoured to keep her eyes fixed on the stage, and to confine her attention to the music. She could not help, occasionally, stealing a peep into the Olinskis' box opposite, where Ormsby seemed to have been most

cordially received by both mother and daughters, and where she could see that he was endeavouring to make himself particularly agreeable. Nor could she prevent, occasionally, overhearing scraps of the conversation which was passing on each side of her. On the one, there seemed nothing that concerned her in particular, as the widow was only flirting pretty freely with some young Italians, who appeared to be in her train; but in the intervals, when the conversation on that side was rather soft than loud, she could distinctly hear the shrill, harsh voice of Mrs. Laceby, elevated as if in indignation, and pronouncing her name with a contemptuous intonation, whilst she repeated her opinion of—"hardened creature"—"appears in public"—"no sense of shame;" a sentence against which Colonel Canteen seemed, in vain, endeavouring to protest.

Mrs. Laceby was one of those who literally feasted upon the failings of her neighbours. With her, the discovery of vice in another was equivalent to the practice of virtue by herself. Proud of her own unimpeachable correctness of conduct, whilst she anathematized the weaknesses of others, she considered herself quite at liberty, by neglecting the amiable in manner, to render virtue odious, and her home disagreeable; and as long as she relentlessly denounced those whom passion had induced to desert their domestic duties, she considered herself quite justified in giving her own husband daily cause to wish, in vain, that she would follow their example, and leave him in peace.

From all that Matilda that night both heard and saw, she felt but too sensibly the difference there was in her's and Ormsby's situation. True, they were at present, in every respect

united; and she had never, for a moment, had the least reason to doubt his affection; on the contrary, his devotion had seemed only to increase with the continuance of the connexion. But should any thing happen to dissolve that connexion, how different upon the one and the other would be the consequences of separation! From his reception that night by the Olinskis, she persuaded herself that he would not only be restored to his former place in society, but that he would be perhaps more than ever *recherché* from his temporary seclusion. But what, on the other hand, would become of her? From what had that night passed on each side of her, she perceived, that if deprived of his protection, she should be exposed to every species of contumely;—that the two extremes of her own sex, differing in every thing else, could unite, at least, in annoyance to her;—and, that from men, she would only

have to choose between contemptuous neglect, and still more insulting attentions.

The pain which these reflections gave her, did not make the time appear to pass more quickly, whilst in her solitary box she was impatiently awaiting Ormsby's return. She felt additionally hurt, too, that he should be so slow in perceiving that she was alone. He was no longer in the front place in the Olinskis' box, which he had at first occupied, and she had therefore concluded that he was on his return to her; and had been every moment expecting the door to be opened by him, when she observed that Madame Olinski was still talking with considerable animation to some one in the back of the box; and this person's head being for a moment advanced, she perceived it to be Ormsby, who was still there. This discovery was almost too much for her harrassed spirits; particularly as the curtain

dropped before Ormsby returned, saying, "What a short ballet! I had no idea it was so near over, or I would have returned sooner."

"Short, did you think it?" she replied; "to me it appeared to last for ever."—"Have you been long alone?" added Ormsby. "I saw the Colonel still with you when I made a move to return to you some time back; but Madame Olinski insisted upon my not leaving them so soon, and they are so entertaining."

Matilda did not feel equal to making any comment upon their encomium at the time it was made, as they were at that moment descending the crowded staircase; but after they were in the carriage on their return home, Ormsby again resumed, "Indeed, I don't any where know such pleasant people as the Olinskis."

"Dear Ormsby," Matilda replied, in a voice of stifled emotion, "are you sure that it

is not the contrast to the life you have been lately leading, which makes you think so? Any one would appear pleasant after your poor Matilda, who can no longer boast that easy flow of spirits which is derived from a mind at ease, nor has yet attained the hardened feelings which habit *may* perhaps some day or other give her." There was something in the plaintive but uncomplaining tone of this gentle appeal, which sensibly touched Ormsby. High spirits, a natural turn for society, and the first renewal of a former agreeable, though not valuable acquaintance, had led him for a moment into something very like neglect of Matilda; but not only was the ardour of his affection for her unabated, but he had at all times a most peculiar sensibility to self-reproach at having wounded the feelings of others. This made him suffer severely from the conviction that she had felt his conduct as neglect.

" Can you then suppose that all the frivolous amusement of all the Olinskis in the world, could compensate to me for causing one moment's uneasiness to my own Matilda?" Thus he fervently exclaimed, and thus he truly felt;—and the warning he then received, made him, from that time, more than ever scrupulous in his exclusive devotion to her.

CHAPTER XXX.

It may perhaps be objected to my heroine, that she seems at this time only to have been rendered acutely sensible of the degradation of her situation, when brought actually in contact with the contempt of the world; and that at other times she appears to have enjoyed intervals of happiness. But let it be recollected, how long she had been a stranger to kindness or attention at home, and that now she was engrossed by the exclusive devotion of one whose whole business seemed to be to endeavour to conceal from her every reality but the consciousness of being beloved. But as each of these successive incidents served to rouse her better feelings, her sense of shame and remorse became more and more acute, and

the intervening gleams more broken and disturbed.

In pursuance of his desire to alleviate the inevitable *desagrémens* of Matilda's situation, and prevent her attention from dwelling upon the mortifications which might follow every attempt to mingle again in society, Ormsby proposed a party to Pæstum. To this Matilda willingly acceded, and Colonel Canteen and Mr. Wordsworth also begged to be allowed to accompany them. The drive from Naples to Pæstum was delightful, it being just the season when such an excursion is most enjoyable. The first September rains were just over, and the cloudless brilliancy of the sky was restored, with that renewed freshness which the long continuance of dry weather had previously destroyed.

The pre-arrangement of a party of pleasure is not in Italy, as it is in England, offering a

certain premium for disappointment. In England, the long-expected morning is sure to be ushered in by a falling glass and louring clouds; and a doubtful debate of "To be, or not to be?"—when the devoted victims at last desperately determine to persevere,—parasols are exchanged for umbrellas, the gay holiday garb is shrouded in the thickest cloaks, and with funereal faces they start in pursuit of painful pleasure; probably on a *water* party, —with as much of that element above as below them,—and adding the certainty of being drenched to the chance of being drowned. But in Italy the rain descends at stated periods, does its duty, and then is no longer a matter of speculation or of dread.

Upon arriving at Pæstum, whilst Matilda stopped to take a hasty sketch, the three gentlemen strolled through the ruins; where their attention was attracted towards the remains of

a very substantial luncheon, which shewed that there was also another party there, and which some empty porter bottles seemed to mark as English.

"One can track the haunts of one's countrymen, like the encampments of the Indian tribes, by the bones of the victims they have devoured," said Ormsby, pointing to some well-cleaned drumsticks and pinions.

"We are grown a dreadfully locomotive population," said Harry Wordsworth; "all our cits now desert the Thames for the Nile, shoot the cataracts instead of London Bridge, and instead of a chop at the Red House, pic nic among the pyramids. But this has been a most ravenous tribe, by the havoc they have made. Look at all these sacred shrouds, from which these mangled remains have been cruelly torn," added he, collecting, between the tips of the fingers of his French gloves,

almost a file of Galignani's Messengers, which had served as covering to the profusion of food that had been dispatched.

" Do you remember," said Ormsby, " Dr Johnson's indignation at ' the feelings of that man, whose patriotism would not gain force on the plains of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona?' What would he think then of those who could pick chicken bones under the pillars of the Temples of Pæstum?"

" Why," said Harry, " that in all probability they had that sort of philosophy which constitutes happiness; according to the Frenchman, who says, ' *pour bien jouir de la vie, il faut avoir un mauvais cœur et un bon estomac.*' "

" This is all very fine," said Colonel Canteen, who had been a silent, but not an inattentive listener to a conversation in which

eating formed so principal a feature : " but," added he, " one cannot consent to starve upon stones. These pillars would be rather hard of digestion, however well they may do to ruminate upon."

At this moment, distant tittering and giggling announced the approach of the party, whose previous proceedings had excited so much attention, and, at the opposite angle of the building from that where the gentlemen had been standing, and nearer to the spot where Matilda was seated sketching, appeared a number of ladies and gentlemen, whose gay attire, merry tones, and confused chattering, seemed to show that they were enjoying that excess of excitement, which English people only experience at a genuine junket. A disagreeable impression, too, was made upon Matilda, that amongst this confusion of tongues, there were some voices that she had heard

before; and this was painfully confirmed, when she distinguished, elevated above the rest, the shrill tones of Mrs. Hobson.

"Well, you may say what you please, but this temple, or house, or pest-town, or whatever you call it, is only fit for the *lazarettos* to live in, with nothing but their *pillows* fot walls."

"Pæstum, Ma'am," said Mrs. Simperton on her right; and "Lazaroni, you mean, Ma'am," said Mrs. Woodhead on her left. "And the Lazàroni," added Tom, "have only walls for pillows, instead of pillows, as you call them, for walls."

At these unwelcome sounds, Matilda drew her veil closer on the side from which they came, and continued intent upon her sketch book. But at the same time Miss Jemima Hobson, who was a bit of a romp, and was

still of that innocent age, when a happy ignorance both of the manners and the morals of the world is at least supposed, cried out, "Oh! look! here's a lady drawing! I must just run and have a peep;" then, skipping close up to our heroine, she exclaimed, "Law, mamma! if it a'nt aunt Matilda!" At this dreaded recognition, Matilda's pencil dropped from her hand, whilst her head sunk closer to her book.

"What!" cried Mrs. Hobson; "come here, child."

"Come here, Jemima," said Mrs. Simperton.

"Come away, directly," re-echoed Mrs. Woodhead; and all the females of the family immediately skuttled away, followed by their attendant beaux.

"And is it come to this?" thought Ma-

tilda, as she trembled in every joint. "Must I hide my head abashed, in the presence of a woman whose gross vulgarity of mind, as well as of manners, I used to despise and ridicule? But it is as it should be. Self-respect, once forfeited, the rest follows of course. Oh, my God!" she exclaimed, bursting into an agony of tears, "How am I fallen—how debased!"

When the Hobson party passed Lord Ormsby and his friends, there was a little awkwardness of deportment as they hurried by. Mr. Simperton stopped an instant, and his natural servility towards any great man, struggling with his sense of propriety, he hesitatingly addressed Ormsby;—"I hope your *Ludship* will not attribute any thing in our conduct to intentional disrespect, or spontaneous slight; but your Ludship must be aware that, in persons of my cloth, some attention to appearance is required."

For a moment, Lord Ormsby eyed this observer of appearances from head to foot, as he stood opposite to him, nearly two thousand miles from his cure. It was hard to say, whether his 'cloth' was marked by his broad-brimmed white beaver, his sky-blue neck-cloth, or his light jean jacket, tight nankeen pantaloons, and buff boots.

"You are, no doubt, quite right, Sir, to act up to your own ideas of attention to appearances," said Lord Ormsby, and passed on towards Matilda, after telling his two friends that he would return to them: for he imagined that she might have been discomposed by the suddenness of the meeting with the Hobsons, and he did not wish that they should witness her distress.

The Hobson party in the mean time prepared to depart. Old Hobson was not there, as he had insisted upon being left behind at Naples,

though utterly helpless there by himself; because, in his business days at Manchester, he had always refused to be included in any junketing expedition. Squire Woodhead had driven his lovely bride in a new phaeton, which he had sported upon their marriage; and Tom, emulous of the charioteering fame of his friend, had undertaken to act as toolsman to Mr. and Mrs. Simperton, his mother, and youngest sister, in a hired *caratella*, drawn by two rather unmanageable half-broken Calabrian poneys.

Tom was a little out of humour at this precipitate departure; and his notions of decorum not being very distinct, he would willingly have compromised all the female propriety of the family (which had induced them to avoid Lady Matilda) for the chance of being noticed himself by any of the gentlemen of her party; a distinction he much desired,

from what he considered such " tip-top first-rates."

" What an escape we have had," said Mrs. Simperton. " What would they have said in the archdeaconry, if they had known that Jemima had been just going to speak to her? I don't think that Mrs. Philpotts would have spoken to *me* if she had spoken to her—would she, Mr. S.?"

" Fudge!" muttered Tom, as, mounting the box to follow his friend, who was already under weigh, he vented the rest of his spleen in a cut at one of the Calabrians; who replied at once with a grunt, a squeak, a caper, and a kick.

" For Heaven's sake, take care, Tom," said Mrs. Simperton; " you would not surely frighten me in my situation." But Tom, whose iron nerves left him very little regard for the fanciful apprehensions of any

one, however interesting the situation by which they were caused, persevered, without heeding this pathetic appeal, in an intemperate conflict with his refractory steeds; which soon gave the rest of the party cause to share in Mrs. Simperton's (no longer affected) alarm.

Matilda's spirits having been completely upset by this unexpected meeting with the Hobsons, and the pleasure of the party consequently destroyed, Ormsby became anxious to return, and Harry Wordsworth and the Colonel having succeeded in getting the carriage ready nearly as soon as the other party had effected their departure, they followed on the same route. After they had proceeded a little distance from Pæstum, Harry Wordsworth remarked, that the tracks of the carriage before them, instead of keeping straight in the middle of the road, had

gone wavering and serpentining backwards and forwards like a fanciful scroll on a paper border. Hardly had he made the observation when the postillions gave a yell of delight at something that seemed to amuse them just as they came to a place where the road was narrow, and the ditch was wide,—and, deposited in the latter, they descried the whole Hobson family. Their postillions, who enjoyed the joke uncommonly, passed them at full gallop, when Matilda exclaimed, " Oh, stop! stop, for Heaven's sake! they may be hurt—may be killed."

To persuade their drivers to stop was not the work of a moment; but when it was effected, Matilda begged Colonel Canteen to return and see if any of the other party were hurt, and if so, to offer them the use of her carriage to convey them to the nearest house. The Colonel gladly undertook the commis-

sion, and upon arriving there addressed Mr. Simperton, who, though much discomposed, seemed to have been uppermost in the scramble: "The lady I am with begged I would express her regret at the accident, and her hope, that should any be much injured by it, they would accept the loan of her carriage to convey them where they would have assistance. You will perfectly understand, that the delicacy of her situation prevents her appearing herself, to offer any personal assistance, which she would otherwise have been most happy to do." "What!" said Mrs. Hobson, as she rose with dignity from the ditch,—"What, indeed! no, tell her that *I* am not ashamed to show *my* face—*I* don't want to be *white-washed—my* hands are *clean*." The Colonel could hardly help smiling at observing how far her present appearance practically confirmed these asser-

tions; which will be best imagined by recollecting that the ditch was deep, and the rains had been recent and abundant. The well-bred messenger was, however, disgusted at the rude manner in which his well-meant embassy had been received; and finding that none of the party seemed seriously the worse, he retired, and communicated to Matilda only so much of the substance of the answer, as a man of the world could reduce into civil terms. And this was the last Matilda ever saw of the Hobson Family.

CHAPTER XXXI.

It was not many days after the expedition to Pæstum, that Matilda had one evening sought, in the neighbourhood of the Camaldole Convent, a spot where, unsoothed by the consolations of Ormsby, she might for a time abandon herself uninterruptedly to her own bitter reflections;—a melancholy indulgence, in which she had latterly often taken a strange pleasure. As she leant over a low wall, from which is seen one of the finest and most varied prospects in the world, all nature's brilliant loveliness was wasted on her, whose eyes, intently fixed on vacancy, conveyed no other impression but that all was dark and dreary within.

She at length turned to depart,—when the

first outward object that succeeded in attracting her attention was the figure of the monk of Saint Peter's, who stood before her.—He seemed in no haste to break that protracted silence which followed this recognition. At last he began: "Something of this I had heard, and much I feared. Hadst thou been thus when last I saw thee, thou mightest have passed unheeded by.—Happy even then thou didst not seem, or thou hadst not looked so like thy suffering, saint-like mother. But she never looked as thou lookest now."

"Oh no, I trust in Heaven she never had the cause!" Matilda said.

"She never had," the monk replied; "for I know too well from whence such desolation of appearance, such utter wretchedness must come. Those who have reaped the bitter harvest of remorse, know too well the disfiguring furrows that it leaves. But fallen

as I see thou art, how can I hope that the tale I have to tell, which requires high-minded self-sacrifice to bear, will not be rejected by thy unworthy ears?"

"Nay," replied Matilda—"though I am little prone to palliate my offences, yet do not think that any worldly sacrifice would be difficult to me. Did you but know my unhappy story"——"Hold," interrupted the monk, "I ask not thy confidence: my duty is to force my own on thee. Why should I listen to the sad recital of your guilt?—I am too old to indulge idle curiosity—too forlorn to offer comfort—too abject to give advice. But to be brief, and to the point: I come to tell thee that Delaval and its ample domains are not thine by right."

"Most welcome news!" cried Matilda, whose thoughts immediately turned towards

the effect which this discovery might have in facilitating the divorce.

" I am glad to hear that exclamation," continued the monk ; " for then I need only hint the outlines of my tale, and give at once the ample proofs of its truth into the hands of one by whom it appears that they will be thankfully received. Of myself it is not necessary to say much, except that my name is Mortimer,—that I am descended from one of the younger branches of an ancient English Catholic family, whose reduced means obliged them to have me educated in a foreign university; from whence, merely from the absence of any other mode of providing for me, I was designed for the priesthood. It was impossible that any destination more at variance with my natural disposition could have been devised. But my religion excluding me from

any of the active and honourable professions in my own country, my patriotic feelings preventing me from serving against her, and my family pride making me despise the drudgery of a counting-house, there seemed no alternative; and having taken the necessary vows, I became, in due time, but whilst still very young, an inmate in the house of your grandfather, in the character of family priest and confessor. It is no vanity now to say that I soon grew to be a great favourite with all the family; but it is some shame to add, that in the situation I then filled I found the dissipated character of the last Lord Wakefield most congenial to my own. I was his constant companion, and in the course of a career of profligacy I contracted large pecuniary obligations to him. Even in his early days of apparently heedless dissipation I had reason to know that he cherished deeper designs, and

that ambition even then had charms for him. The ill-health of your amiable and excellent father seemed to hold out prospects of his being able to indulge these extended views; and whilst I was the chosen companion of that father in his last tour abroad, I blush to say that I was a secret spy upon his actions, devoted to the interests of the younger brother.

"When Lord Wakefield, who mixed little in the world, became enamoured of the beautiful daughter of a noble Milanese, all my artifices were exerted in vain to prevent that union, which was stolen and secret, from the insuperable objections entertained by her family against him as an Englishman; though in this instance those objections were not strengthened by any difference of religion. This marriage seemed a death-blow to the hopes of my patron; who wrote, accusing me

strongly of neglect of his interest, and threatening me with that ruin which the extent of my pecuniary obligations to him made it at any time in his power to effect. But during the pregnancy of your mother, Lord Wakefield, whose health had appeared perfectly re-established, suddenly sickened of a fever. Almost from the first, his life was despaired of; and then it was that he made that disposition of his property which left every thing that was in his own power absolutely to his posthumous offspring, male and female: much, however, in case of the child proving a girl, necessarily accompanied the title. The guardianship was left to the mother if she survived, and in case of her death, to the uncle.

" This uncle, upon hearing of his brother's death, hastened to the neighbourhood, where

he remained concealed, but in constant communication with me; whilst the unhappy widow, an exile from her own home, awaited the event of her confinement.

"When in due time the unfortunate Roealia was delivered of twins, I was the wretched instrument used by Lord Wakefield to conceal the fact that the boy was born alive; and I presented you alone to your mother's longing arms. It was not long that she enjoyed even this consolation; for not many months afterwards she sunk broken-hearted into an untimely grave, and you were committed to the exclusive care of your uncle.

"From this moment Lord Wakefield's conduct towards me changed. He hated me, I believe, for the services I had rendered him; and when, after lingering abroad

two or three years, he returned to England, he would not hear of my accompanying him, but made me an allowance conditional upon my remaining in Italy, and superintending the concealment of the rightful heir, who was consigned to the care of a peasant.

" Upon the breaking out of the war, this allowance became irregular; and when at length it completely stopped, nothing but the dread of the infamy which would attend my share in the business prevented my starting for England, in order to upbraid Lord Wakefield and disclose the whole.

" But though this I dared not do, I could not bear to see the noble child, who was born to a far different fate, degraded by menial toil. And that discovery which I had not the courage to make complete, I communi-

cated in part to his maternal grandfather, Count Santelmo,—by whom he was gladly acknowledged."

"By whom did you say?" cried Matilda, with breathless eagerness.

"By Count Santelmo," repeated the monk.

"Merciful powers! He is then my brother!" she exclaimed; "and there is one in the world whom I can love without sin."

"Thou knowest him, then?" cried the monk. "Then, let me conjure thee, hasten to do justice and make restitution, in order that those empty repinings, and that barren repentance, which for years have embittered my cloistered privacy, may at length take the substantial form of real atonement. Then may I hope to close my eyes in peace; and, by disinterestedly offering to resign that which, backed by the proofs I have to give, the law

might in time force from thee, *thy* errors may be obliterated too, and thy faults forgiven."

"I trust," said Matilda, "that under no circumstances should I desire to retain by artifice, that which was not mine by right. But in this instance I will not pretend to take the merit of a sacrifice. Situated as I am, it will be more than a relief to be rid of the burthen of my inheritance; and that which to a stranger I would gladly resign, I shall even rejoice in transferring to one, whose happiness, if I am not mistaken, it will contribute to ensure."

"Something," replied the monk, "I had imperfectly learnt of the difficulties of his latter life; and this had made me more than ever anxious to unburthen myself of those painful disclosures; for whilst I heard that he continued in the tranquil enjoyment of his

maternal inheritance, I was the less eager to cause the confusion which must arise from reversing the present settlement of the property. But I can never bear to think of his wandering about, an unacknowledged exile, when it is in my power to restore to him country and fortune, of which I unjustly deprived him. Here, therefore, without hesitation, I resign into your hands those proofs of the truth of my tale, which you will find in this pacquet of written communications, between me and your uncle, whose handwriting you will recognise.—I give them to you, I repeat, in the most perfect confidence, from the little I have seen of you, that you will make that use of them which justice requires; as my monastic vows and habits of seclusion would render it inconvenient for me to take an active part in the business.—Should any further information be required, I shall

be found here at the same hour to-morrow." Saying this he slowly departed, and Matilda hastened to communicate to Ormsby the strange disclosures of this eventful morning.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Upon hearing from Matilda these strange and unexpected discoveries, Ormsby became most eager to lose no time in probing them to the bottom, and obtaining, if possible, further proofs from the monk, in confirmation of the story he told. In pursuance of this object, he himself kept the appointment which Mortimer had made for the morrow, on the same spot, and at the same hour, and he then succeeded in obtaining a sight of some other documents in the hand-writing of the last Lord Wakefield, which, for his own satisfaction, the monk still retained in his possession. He also learnt the name and residence of the

"Fattore," in the neighbourhood of Genoa, on whose farm the young Santelmo had, in concealment, passed the first years of his infancy, till restored to his grandfather's family; also the direction of the priest who solemnized the private marriage between his parents, and who was now the principal of a monastery on the Piedmontese side of the Alps. There were also the names of several distinguished families whom Mortimer had formerly known, as resident upon the borders of Piedmont and the Milanese, in which neighbourhood the Santelmo property was situated, and who, if still living, must recollect many circumstances connected with the supposed marriage and subsequent death of the unfortunate Countess Rosalia. All these, and more than these confirmations, Ormsby's experience told him would be necessary, in order to convert the moral conviction he him-

self felt of the truth of the story told by Mortimer, into that legal proof which could alone be serviceable to Santelmo.

Our hero's abstract love of justice would have induced him to think lightly of any trouble or difficulties which might attend his endeavours to restore to an injured individual his birthright, when chance seemed to have confided to him the means requisite for attaining that object. But other motives were certainly not without their share, in causing him to make that sacrifice of his feelings and his inclinations, which he was afterwards induced to do, by his eagerness to effect the re-instalment of Santelmo in the property of his fathers.

However Sir James Dornton might delay his proceedings for the divorce, from a sordid desire to make his profit from some speculations he had undertaken on the Delaval property, before he should be obliged to relinquish

it, yet there seemed no doubt, from the publicity of the elopement, that the divorce would follow sooner or later. But that it should be sooner, and *not* later, was of the utmost importance to Ormsby; who could not bear the idea that it might be delayed till after the birth of that child whom Matilda must now, before many months elapsed, bring into the world. He looked forward with horror to the idea of perpetuating reproachful distinctions even in the bosom of his family, and seeing his first, perhaps his favourite child, illegitimatized, and supplanted by all those who might come after him—his younger brothers by blood, but superiors in rank.

Distracted with this idea, which his kind nature and his family pride united to render painful, he knew that the establishment of another rightful claimant to the Delaval property would mainly contribute to accelerate

his object; and that for the timely acknowledgment of that claimant's right, it was necessary his own personal exertions should be used without delay, in accumulating the proofs of which he had received the clue.

Feeling all this, yet could he not resolve to make the effort to leave Matilda in her present situation. To prevail upon him to do so, all her influence was used, and in a manner which her disinterested nature led her to believe would be most effective.

"Till now I could never have believed that any combination of circumstances could have reconciled me to your absence, much less induced me to urge it. But it is time to reject all selfish considerations. There are those to whom we have done much wrong, to whom we may now make a tardy reparation.

"Let none imagine, that, by the criminal indulgence of their passions, they injure them-

selves alone. Your excellent mother, and the innocent Emily,—to them we have brought shame and sorrow, instead of the comfort their kindness merited; but we still have it in our power to ensure their happiness. I have often regretted to you the attachment between Emily and Santelmo, which his condition rendered hopeless. Let us then not lose a moment in removing the only objection that could exist to the union of two beings every way formed for each other."

"You cannot be more anxious than I am for such an event," returned Ormsby; "but here, at least, there is no cause for such breathless haste, as to force me from you even now. Sure of each other, what can prevent the timely accomplishment of their wishes?"

"Oh, Ormsby," answered Matilda, "WE, at least, cannot blind ourselves to the dangers of delay. Had worldly objections never inter-

posed to part *us*, how different had been our present situation! And if Emily will not be exposed to those fatal artifices which were used to separate *us*, yet think how much more hopeless than your's could ever be, is Santelmo's condition;—a banished wanderer upon the face of the earth, with no ties of country or of family —his ardent nature burning with a sense of wrong, which it is too probable will, ere long, hurry him headlong into some desperate design. Should we, then, lose one moment in saving him from impending ruin, and restoring him to that happy position in society which is his by right—where his love of liberty may find an ample, though peaceful field for the exertion of its energies, and his kindlier affections meet their just reward?"

Moved by arguments such as these, seconded as they were by his own anxiety to omit no possible means of accelerating the divorce,

Orsmby admitted that he ought, at all hazards, to exert himself to procure the necessary proofs, in confirmation of the birth of Matilda's brother. And as it was evident to both, that she was not at present in a state to accompany him in a long and harrassing journey, their temporary separation was inevitable. She had, however, a particular dislike to being left alone at Naples,—the ceaseless bustle and exuberant gaiety of which, was most distasteful to her in her present state of mind. Nice occurred to them both as a tranquil retreat, in which she might await his return; and an opportunity of a conveyance thither, by sea, occurring at that time, they gladly availed themselves of it; and Matilda left matchless Naples, not only without regret, but with a sense of disgust a the recollection of many of the miseries to which so uncongenial a residence had exposed her.

Striking was the contrast which the place of their destination furnished upon their first arrival. Instead of an ever-varying chaos of sounds, the effervescence of the reckless mirth of the most mercurial population in the world, all around them seemed now hushed into a preternatural stillness. The very climate was soft rather than brilliant,—as if partaking of the subdued tone most congenial to its sad office, of soothing the sufferings of invalids, and delaying where it cannot eventually prevent the progress of lingering—often hopeless disease.

In a small and secluded villa, within a short, distance of the town, Matilda was established previously to Ormsby's departure; which, knowing to be inevitable, they neither of them wished should be delayed. Ormsby had already written to his man of business, in England, enclosing copies of the late Lord Wakefield's

letters, and explaining the extraordinary disclosures to which they referred; also mentioning the other confirmatory testimony which he was about to obtain. He was not without hopes, that these circumstances, when hinted in a circuitous manner to Sir James's advisers, might make them anxious, for the sake of his character, that the proceedings for the divorce should have the precedence of these other discoveries, and should not appear contingent upon the loss of Lady Matilda's fortune.

It was settled that Ormsby should, in the first instance, embark in a felucca for Genoa, and from thence should proceed to the Santelmo property, and endeavour to collect the best evidence of the marriage of the mother, and birth of twins, which the clue, furnished him by Mortimer, might enable him to procure. He intended also, if possible, to see Santelmo himself before his return to Nice.

If it would have been difficult to decide whose anguish was most acute at the moment of separation, there was little room for doubt with whom the exclusive influence of that feeling would be most lasting. In all separations, doubly hard is the lot of that one who is left behind; as change of scene does not more irresistibly tend on the one hand to weaken and obliterate at each repetition one constantly recurring regret, than, on the other hand, the identity and continuance of all inanimate objects around serve to sustain and cherish the recollection of that which is gone, and from which alone they derived their charm.

But besides this, there were particular circumstances in Matilda's situation which rendered constantly increasing the uneasy restlessness caused by Ormsby's absence. In vain she attempted to distract her attention by the enjoyment of the beauties of nature, to which

her mind had been always peculiarly alive, and which here abounded in every variety, even within the limits of her solitary rambles. Still the idea of Ormsby's absence absorbed her whole soul.—" He has then left me, and I am alone," triumphed over every attempt to stifle it with other thoughts:—" Far, far different is my situation from that of a virtuous wife, who, however with affectionate fondness she may regret the temporary absence of her husband, yet consoling herself with the consciousness of the performance of her own domestic duties, looks forward with certainty to his stated return. But what right have I to indulge any such prospective security? True, he left me with the protracted embrace of ardent affection, but with what confidence can I anticipate the undiminished warmth of his feelings on his return? That he should desert me, I do not fear; his goodness of heart and

his honour will alike prevent that; yet, have I not cause to dread that absence? May not reflection conspire to remove the delusions of passion, and may he not then see me such as I am,—a poor fallen, guilty creature? In vain would his kindness attempt to conceal such a consequence of our ill-starred separation; quick as lightning could I detect the least diminution in his love, the consciousness of which would kill me; and if my fears are well founded, all I hope is, that I may be spared the last pang of knowing that they are so."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THERE is something peculiarly melancholy in the reflections excited by an English burial-ground in a foreign land. The sight of so many whose career has been abruptly closed, even in the midst of a transitory tour of pleasure, furnishes the aptest illustration of the uncertainty of our worldly pilgrimage; and the long list of those who, buoyed up by youth and hope, had vainly sought here a secure asylum from the attacks of a treacherous disease, shews the nullity of all human efforts to avoid the decrees of a Superior Power. Reason rejects the idea, that when the nobler part of man is relieved from "this flesh which walls about our life," the freed spirit should condescend to waste a thought

on what part of the world dust to dust returns; yet it is a weakness inseparable from our frail natures in their present imperfect state, that some of the noblest and best have been known to feel, even in their last moments, the keenest anxiety as to the fate of their remains; and the desire that we may repose with our fathers is so universal, that we cannot contemplate our countrymen's foreign cemetery without something of the compassion excited by a sentence of eternal exile.

Matilda's state of mind inducing her rather to court than avoid sorrowful impression, she had often wandered in the English burial ground; and feeling as lost to society as any of those who reposed around, had occupied herself in deciphering the sculptured expressions of the world's esteem, which she had already forfeited, and the praises for the

performance of those duties which she had abandoned.

In one of these sad rambles, she somewhat abruptly met an English lady in deep mourning, who, as she passed, made a sort of doubtful attempt at recognition. At the moment, though Matilda had some recollection of her face, she could not recal her name. The lady was not young, nor regularly handsome, but with a pleasing, though sorrowful expression of countenance, and a complexion of unnatural fairness. After she had passed, Matilda suddenly recovered the remembrance of who she was, and where she had seen her. "It is the Mrs. Sydney, whom I met the year before my marriage, and with whom I was then particularly pleased, in spite of her melancholy manners, which, my uncle said, were intolerable in society. She was always reckoned such a pattern of every virtue, that

even then, I felt awed in her company; and must I now be exposed daily to her reproving gaze? I had but one comfort left—that here, at least, I was perfectly unknown, and unmolested in my solitude."

These, and other reflections of the same description, had, in the course of her next day's ramble, more than usually oppressed her; and her harrassed spirit was relieving itself in tears, when her arm was gently touched, and turning round, she perceived Mrs. Sydney, who in a soothing tone addressed her.

"We are here, Lady Matilda, the only living creatures who are known to each other. It were hard if we did not endeavour to mitigate our griefs by sharing them."

Matilda was at first so overcome with the unexpected and unwonted kindness of this salutation, that she could not at once enter

into that explanation, which she considered due to one, whose notice of her she thought could only arise from an ignorance of her present situation. At last she faltered out:—

"I was, even when last we met, unworthy the notice of one so good as you; but how infinitely more so I have since become, if you have not heard, your goodness cannot conceive."

"Whatever I may have heard—what I see is—that you are unhappy;—which is all that I will recollect:—for there can be no stronger bond of union than misery, to one who has led the life that I have done."

"Nay; but still," said Matilda, "you cannot know all. Let me entreat you to guess the worst, and spare me the pain of explaining my present condition; for it is impossible that one whose notions (forgive me whilst I say it) were considered only too strict and rigid for

the present forms of society, should knowingly stoop to associate with an outcast like me. Even your spotless reputation might suffer from my contaminating touch."

"I have no such fear," returned Mrs. Sydney; "to successful vice—fashion never made me bow my head; nor shall the world and its inconsistent censure now induce me to avoid one to whom I may be of service;—a sinner, perhaps, but I am sure not a hardened one," she added, pressing Matilda's hand, and looking kindly in her face, as she led her through a little gate into the garden which surrounded her villa.

"Am I then, at last, to find a friend, and such a friend?" said Matilda, much affected, as she returned the pressure of Mrs. Sydney's offered arm.

"Think not," continued Mrs. Sydney, "in the contempt I expressed for the justice of

the opinion of the world, that, however, in the performance of a duty, I might consent to endure it, I should ever have the idle Quixotism wantonly to brave it. But I feel that I have stood its test in the most trying situation to which a woman can be exposed; and I believe, many-tongued scandal never accused me even of levity."

"Oh, no," replied Matilda, "I have always heard your correctness of conduct cited as unquestioned; and that too, by those with whom such praise was not entirely unmixed with an attempt at ridicule."

"Well, then," said Mrs. Sydney, "it is not now that I am to be deterred, by any over-anxiety about my own reputation, from endeavouring to soothe and serve one in whom I am sure the sense of right is not destroyed: it is not now that I can hesitate in making the

attempt to awaken a timely repentance; when, having lost all that rendered life valuable, I have a consciousness, unmingled with regret, that I myself do but linger a moment longer on the verge of the grave."

Matilda started at these mournful words. "'Tis very true," quietly replied Mrs. Sydney; "I feel it here," she added, touching her breast; "and you may trace it here," pointing to her cheek, in the brilliant hue of which, the hectic flush could not upon inspection be mistaken for the bloom of health.

Matilda sighed; for she could not deny the indications of her new friend's danger.

"'Tis no less true, that I have no cause to regret it. The only connexion which death has not already dissolved, is that which unkindness has interrupted and broken."

"Were you then unhappy in your married

life?" interrupted Matilda; "was your's a constrained union with one utterly unsuited to you?"

"On the contrary," said her friend, "as much misery may sometimes be produced by yielding to the illusions of passion, as by attending exclusively to worldly views.—Mine was a love match. Mr. Sydney had all that could captivate a young and inexperienced girl; but as a husband—he never was a kind one. His temper was not proof against the constantly increasing difficulties of a straitened income, and his vanity could not withstand the artifices of one of the most designing of our sex. He left me for a wealthier and handsomer woman. Since then, cruel losses in my own family have made me an heiress; and I have placed at his disposal the principal part of that fortune I have acquired; but, I have ceased even to wish for his society. Fondly attached

to my family, I for some time enjoyed the calm consolation of their reciprocal affection; but one by one, all that rendered life valuable have been removed; and I have been left alone in the world.—Oh, Lady Matilda, of the manifold afflictions to which human nature is exposed, there are few greater than being born to see all those nearest and dearest to you fall successive victims to that cruel disease which, lurking in our frames, frequently under the outward show of health and beauty, delights most to prey on those whose youth and yet unblighted hopes make existence precious. I was born of a consumptive family; from our excellent mother we inherited this fatal bane. We early lost her,—soon after my father (who was in the army) was killed in the beginning of the French war. To my brother we were all accustomed to look with mingled love and admiration, as our natural

protector. — He was a fine, ardent, high-spirited creature, with that sanguine temperament which is not an unusual concomitant of this disease. In the midst of the confident indulgence of prospective plans for us and for himself, he fell its first almost unconscious victim. Why should I pursue this subject farther? My last and favourite sister, the one nearest my own age, but two months since was standing where you do now, eagerly anticipating our return to England.—When I met you yesterday, I had been weeping over her grave."

Mrs. Sydney paused to recover herself, and having made a strong effort to do so, continued: "You will perhaps think that selfishness was the actuating motive which induced me to obtrude myself upon you; for in my lonely and dying state, what are the world and its prejudices to me, in comparison with

the acquisition of a friend? but if I hope to receive comfort, so do I also trust that it may be in my power likewise to impart some.—Forgive me, dear Lady Matilda, when I say, that gladly welcoming as I do in you the evident symptoms of regret for past errors, I trust I may be enabled to lead your thoughts to that Source which has been *my* true, constant, and only consolation in all my miseries; and from whence comfort may be poured upon your sorrows, and blessings upon your repentance."

From this day Matilda and Mrs. Sydney became inseparable companions. Our heroine, so far from being distressed by the association with one who seemed to have so much reason for melancholy, gradually succeeded in attaining that calm composure which was the characteristic of her friend. Her mind again became alive to the beauties of nature, and she

was induced again to avail herself of her pencil and sketch-book, in those pauses in their rambles which her own situation and the weakness of her friend rendered alike necessary to both.

In the mean time her mind was relieved by hearing constantly from Ormsby of the successful progress of his inquiries relative to Santelmo; and also by learning that the proceedings for the divorce had been commenced, and were going on without any fear of further delay.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Ormsby's absence had been unexpectedly protracted, by the difficulty he had found in accumulating from so many different quarters, and in a foreign land, the conclusive proofs of Santelmo's birth, and in tracing his identity through the different situations of his early life. But at length Matilda received from him the glad tidings that his disinterested labours had been brought to a successful termination, and that the evidence he had obtained was such as could not be resisted in any court of justice. He added, that, as the speediest mode of returning to her, he should embark in a felucca at Genoa, and again should have the inexpressible delight of beholding her on the day immediately suc-

ceeding that in which she received the letter. In conclusion, he congratulated himself on the intelligence he had received from England, that Sir James Dornton's divorce bill had already passed one branch of the Legislature, and that, therefore, almost immediately upon his return he should have it in his power to make her irrevocably his.

"I am aware," said her friend, Mrs. Sydney, upon this intelligence being communicated to her, "I am aware that, in the minds of many excellent persons, very considerable doubts are entertained as to the propriety of these marriages; but, in my humble opinion, it is contrary to the benevolent principles of our religion to place any one in a state of irreclaimable sin. Many I know of those who have been thus redeemed, have been irreproachable as wives and mothers; and, in your particular case, I

trust that the salutary interval of solitary repentance may have so chastened your mind, as that you will be properly prepared solemnly to undertake these new duties." Matilda bowed her head in humble acquiescence.

The morning of the day on which Ormsby was expected was serene and brilliant; it was one of those extraordinary efforts of nature, which, in that delicious climate, defying the calculations of the calendar, charm one with a feeling of summer security even in the midst of winter. Matilda had persuaded her friend to accompany her to the farther extremity of the terrace which faces the sea; and on the smooth and sunny horizon her eye had long been fixed, endeavouring to catch the first glimpse of the expected vessel. But there was not, on all this wide expanse of waters, even one white wave to be seen which for a moment she could mistake for a shining sail.

Still it was early, and the kind efforts of Mrs. Sydney to calm her impatience were for some time not entirely without success. Yet hour passed after hour, and still he came not. At length the sun, which had played on the rippled surface before them, had now retired in its daily course to glitter on the still snowy summit of the Alps behind them; and the short hectic cough of Mrs. Sydney, which this chilly change aggravated, reminded Matilda of the danger of indulging in the selfish pleasure of longer detaining her there. She insisted, therefore, on her immediately leaving her, and returning home.

When deprived of her companion, Matilda's impatience of course increased. "With so fair a wind," she thought, "he might have been here before now." As she uttered these words, she started at a sudden gust which, rustling in the fallen leaves, carried them

before her in a sort of whirlwind, to a considerable distance. In her present state of nervous excitement, even so trifling an incident for a moment checked that bounding sense of happiness which she had previously in vain endeavoured to repress, though her reproving conscience told her, that the pleasure she anticipated was a forbidden and guilty one. But this transitory uneasiness again subsided with the momentary agitation of the passing breeze which caused it; and yet a little while she indulged the unbroken hope of the expected meeting.

Left alone to revel uninterruptedly in the enjoyment of her excited feelings, she now eagerly sought a remote promontory, from which she thought she might command a more distant prospect of the course he must come. But when at length she did reach that point, wide and wild enough was the scene that met

her view, yet far different from that which she had fondly anticipated.

Those alone who have actually experienced the awful manner in which, without the least warning of impending danger, tremendous squalls suddenly burst upon the Mediterranean, can form any adequate idea of the almost miraculous change which now took place in the appearance of all things around, and of the accumulating horrors which abruptly presented themselves to the anxious eyes of our heroine. Heavy rolling clouds were collecting on all sides—their darkness and gloom aggravated by the struggling rays of the setting sun, which were making a last effort to pierce through their increasing density.

As she reached the rock she had so anxiously sought, the extensive waste of waters were still discernible; yet not, as an hour since, just rippling their otherwise unbroken surface,

but " curling their monstrous heads" to meet the lowering vapours from above. For a moment she stood rooted to the spot, unmoved even by the violence of the gale, which blew with peculiar force around the point. A cold chill ran through her veins. Even as suddenly as the outward appearance of all around had been sadly changed, the fond hopes she had so lately cherished yielded to an overwhelming sense of impending evil. The low hollow murmur of distant thunder lingered like the knoll of death upon her ear. She pressed her hands upon her breast, and rushed wildly down upon the beach. Utterly unconscious was she how long, with feelings of mental agony far superior to any sense of personal suffering, she wandered in the neighbourhood of that dreary point.

It was only in the aggravation of her fears for him in whom self was utterly absorbed,

that she felt the pelting rain which drenched her light garments; it was only as it impeded her clearer view of the boundless ocean, that she regarded the heavy spray which dashed unceasingly against her delicate frame. But it was no fleeting form assumed by the ever-varying spray,—it was no fancied creation of her troubled spirit, when, almost within reach of the shore, rising upon the darkness before her, a light sail met her eye. One moment she caught it, as waving wildly in the wind, it flapped heavily over the heads of those from whose controul it had broken. It was but a moment, and the last appalling scream of human misery struck upon her ear, as it swept sadly by—mingled with the howling of the tempest.

Those whose career had been thus abruptly closed, were not more unconscious of all that followed the harrowing sound of their expiring

agonies, than was the poor sufferer who had been fated to witness them ; for, almost lifeless, drenched with the rain, and her arms outstretched towards the sea, extended upon the beach, the unfortunate lady was found by her anxious friend,—who had till now in vain sought her from the beginning of the storm, which she knew was so calculated to excite her well-grounded fears for the safety of one on whom her whole happiness depended.

It was with the greatest difficulty that when assistance had been procured, Matilda could be prevailed upon to quit the spot on which she had been found. Her senses had suffered from the shock she had experienced ; and they were only partially restored, to endure the pangs of a premature labour. Long and doubtful was the struggle ; and it was late in the following day, when the almost unconscious mother strained to her broken heart a female

child, whose untimely birth and delicate appearance did not promise a longer continuance of life, than could be hoped for its evidently dying mother.

CHAPTER XXXV.

On the morning on which, as Ormsby had announced to Matilda, he intended to embark at Genoa, he received a letter from his mother; with whom, during his inquiries concerning Santelmo, he had been in constant communication. She wrote to inform him that she had arrived with her daughter and Santelmo at Turin,—that she felt unequal to a longer journey at present, but that she was very anxious to see him. This had determined him to alter his plans, and to proceed at first to Turin, and thence by the Col de Tende to Nice; determining that no unnecessary delay should interpose to prevent his immediate return to Matilda, and hoping that by using extraordinary dispatch in travelling, and only

allowing one day for the arrangement of every thing with his family at Turin, he might, from the greater certainty of land conveyance, still arrive at Nice as soon as he could have done in the manner he had intended.

Though in this he had been disappointed, and had been obliged to submit to a day's delay, yet his kindness of heart had in part reconciled him to it, by the happiness it had enabled him to confer on others.

He had succeeded in arranging every thing for the immediate marriage of Santelmo and Emily; and it had been settled that when that event should have removed the only obstacle to it, Lady Ormsby should follow him, to be present at the time of Lady Matilda's confinement. At Turin he had also received the account of the divorce bill having finally passed the Legislature; so that the pleasure he anticipated from again beholding Matilda was

enhanced by all the agreeable intelligence with which he should have it in his power to cheer her.

After he had descended the last hill into the valley of the Var, he could not help looking out in expectation that she might have come thus far to meet him,—forgetting that he had led her to expect his arrival from quite a different quarter.

Before the carriage had reached the villa, his eager eye had sought her well-remembered windows.—"Good God! they are closed! What can it mean? he cried, as, rushing to the door, he there was met by Mrs. Sydney, with whom he was previously unacquainted, but whose face of anxiety seemed to confirm his worst fears. His heart sickened with vague apprehensions; and faltering out the name of Matilda, he attempted to pass at once to her room. Mrs. Sydney gently detained him;—

saying, " Thank God, you are come; but welcome as it is, it must be broken gently, and by degrees, to her; every thing depends upon your not appearing too suddenly."

" For heaven's sake," cried Ormsby, " torture me no longer. What has happened to my Matilda?" And overpowered by the sudden revulsion of feeling, he sank into a chair, and covering his face with his hands, sobbed like an infant.

" Let me entreat you to calm yourself," said Mrs. Sydney. " Lady Matilda is better now—rather better. If you are already so overcome, how will you ever bear to see her?"

" See her!" exclaimed Ormsby, starting up, " this moment will I see her! Fool that I was, to linger here and lose another instant of her loved presence! Nay, in pity tell me then the worst at once. What has happened?" added he, as Mrs. Sydney again laid her hand

upon his arm to draw him back. Many were the interruptions Mrs. Sydney experienced, and agonizing were the sufferings of Lord Ormsby, as the sad tale of the night before was gradually disclosed to him. Yet even in these moments of intense suffering, his generous mind was susceptible of a grateful feeling for the genuine kindness displayed by Mrs. Sydney. How does sorrow at once excite affection for those who share it with us!

"Generous, excellent friend that you have been," said Ormsby. "Leave me—return to my Matilda—tell her that her poor Ormsby lives, and is restored to her.—Oh that, indeed, the bottomless ocean had engulphed me—'twould have been merciful if—but it cannot be—she is young and healthy—she will recover—say that you think she will."

Mrs. Sydney pressed his hand mournfully; and anxious to give a new direction to a mind

that seemed almost maddened with the bewildering emotions of the morning, she pointed to the bed at the further end of the room, where the little infant lay sleeping.

" My poor child," he cried, " what a welcome have I given thee on thy first arrival in this world of sorrows! Heaven preserve thee from that misery, which, much I fear, must be thy too sure inheritance!"

When Mrs. Sydney entered Lady Matilda's room, she found her supported by pillows in her bed—the windows opened wide—her beautiful hands clasped as in prayer—and the big tears chasing each other down her colourless cheek.

" Dearest friend," she said, " I have been very—very faint—but soon I shall meet my love again. I feel it here," pressing her breast; " and most grateful to my heart is the sensa-

tion of death. Nay look not so—for I shall see him—God is merciful—a broken and a contrite spirit will he not reject."

"Dearest Lady Matilda," interrupted her friend, "do not give way to these agitating anticipations of death. I know there is no cause for alarm. But Lord Ormsby you will see, and that soon."

"He's here—he's alive—he is not lost—I read it in your eyes—Ormsby, my love—Oh my God, let me live to see him again!" cried Matilda, as, exhausted by the effort, she sunk fainting on the pillow.

It was in Ormsby's arms that she was restored to consciousness; it was from his trembling hands that she received the restoratives her weakened frame required; and even the stern, relentless hand of death, was for a moment stayed by the renewed energies that

strongest of human passions inspired ; and for a time nothing was felt save the all-engrossing happiness of their re-union.

" My child—*our* child, Ormsby, have you seen it ?" said Matilda, as Mrs. Sydney placed the infant by its mother's side.

" Dearest child !" said Ormsby, kissing it, —" Oh my Matilda, what a treasure it will be to us ! how will our happiness grow with its growth."

" *Our* happiness ! Oh Ormsby—give me air—I am very faint—but do not leave me."

" Leave you !—O that I had never left you for one moment !—how could any thing persuade me to tear myself one instant away from my only treasure ?"

" Say not so—Do not now repine, my love —I trust that good has come out of this evil— Ormsby, I feel that I am more fit to die,— nay, start not.—Had I basked ever in the

sunshine of thy presence, many sad and salutary reflections had been withered and lost. Then think of the dear Emily—her well-merited happiness is cheaply purchased even by death."

"Is there no advice?" said Ormsby; "pray compose yourself—you wear your gentle frame—these emotions are too much for you." Ormsby said true.—She was now utterly exhausted; but it was not with the pleasurable emotions she had experienced only too late. If any thing could have prolonged her fleeting existence, it would have been the happiness she now enjoyed. But her spirit was fluttering on the verge of eternity, and a few hours must see it wing its inevitable flight.

"And is there then no perfect love in this world?" sighed Mrs. Sydney; "must these dear ones part, just when they might in innocence have together lived to repent their past

transgressions? But thy will be done!—Oh that instead—a being so sad and lonely as myself had been fated to leave them behind me!"

There were moments during the remainder of the evening when Matilda's eye shone so brilliantly, and her voice sounded so sweetly, that Ormsby and Mrs. Sydney almost indulged a hope that she might be spared to them; but the medical man conceived it his duty at once to check such vain and fruitless expectation. He solemnly assured them that she could hardly live through the night, and that he much feared the child too could not survive.

Matilda overheard, in part, this opinion; and pressing the unconscious infant to her breast, she exclaimed, "Oh! 'tis too much to hope, even from infinite mercy, that my sins may so far be pardoned that I may be rendered even as this innocent."

"Nay," said Mrs. Sydney, "remember with confidence, that the same Divine authority from which we learn, that of such is the kingdom of Heaven, tells us that there is even more joy over one sinner that repenteth."

Through all that wretched night, Matilda's life was only prolonged by the constant circulation of air through the apartment; and as the darkness and damp gradually dispersed, the shades of death seemed to gather and thicken around her devoted head. The refreshing fragrance of earliest morning played in vain about her livid lips, just struggling to emit the last mortal breath that would ever mingle with the rival sweetness of the air. The first rays of the rising sun shone unseen upon her glassy eye, about to close for ever against the reviving light of day,—it closed—and the sufferer and her sufferings were no more.

When Ormsby awoke from the stupor of despair to the full sense of his utter desolation, he found that his helpless infant had also closed its ephemeral existence, and that he was thus utterly bereaved at once of every outward trace, of every living record, of his late guilty connexion.

After a time, he sought some relief to his feelings in active service in the cause of the Greeks; but even in the most eventful moments of his after-life, that would sometimes obtrude itself, which was never absent from his solitary pillow,—the image of his poor Matilda, as, heart-broken and repentant, he had seen her on the evening preceding the fatal catastrophe which had left him alone in the world.

THE END.

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